Her Heart's Gift

OLIVER KENT

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CONVERSATION HAD BECOME A SURFACE THING TO VEIL THE TUMULT OF THEIR HEARTS.

Frontispiece, p. 187.

HER HEART'S GIFT

BY

OLIVER KENT

AUTHOR OF "HER RIGHT DIVINE"

"Arc upon arc, from shade to shine,
The world went thundering free;
And what was his errand, but hers and mine—
The lords of him, I and she?
Oh, it's die we must, but it's live we can,
And the marvel of earth and sun
Is all for the joy of woman and man,
And the longing that makes them one."

W. E. HENLEY.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
PAUL STAHR

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Her Heart's Gift

TO

ALL FREE WOMEN

WHO HOLD TO THE SPIRIT RATHER

THAN THE LETTER

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Conversation had become a surface thing to veil the tumult of their hearts. . . . . *Frontispiece.* 187

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HER HEART'S GIFT

CHAPTER I

JOINT OWNERSHIP

THE taxicab had come to a halt by the curb in front of the Continental Building. Its occupant stood poised in the doorway ready to alight, held momentarily by the little drama being enacted on the sidewalk. A crowd had gathered around a couple of Italian peasants past middle life, manifestly fresh from the fields of sunny Tuscany. A bright kerchief framed the woman's wrinkled olive face down which the tears channeled, and another circled the dark neck of her husband. They stood hand in hand, bewildered by the strangeness of their environment. Clearly they were victims of overwhelming misfortune stricken with the dumb despair of the peasantry.

A man attempting to make them understand his doubtful French stood conspicuous in the chance street crowd. He was close to six feet,

strong and well set, with a manner of controlled energy that suggested power. He might be a lawyer, or a business man, but unmistakably he was an American of the better class, one born for leadership in whatever line he chose to bend his forces.

His attempts to elicit the cause of the trouble met with no success. The Italians shook their heads helplessly.

From the doorway of the cab the young woman leaned forward and touched the blue sleeve of a policeman.

"Can I be of use? I speak Italian."

The officer turned, touched his helmet, and began to shoulder a lane for her.

"Here's a lady that speaks Italian, Mr. Waller," the policeman said.

The man called Waller raised his hat and yielded the stage at once. He regarded her with interest, this slender, vivid young woman whose perfect costuming seemed but an extension of her own dainty personality. She asked a question, and instantly the dumbness fled the distressed Tuscans. Together, still clinging

palm to palm for support, they poured forth their tale of trouble as children do. Evidently the story of these babes in the woods of civilization opened wide the gateway to the listener's heart. She asked questions, grew eager in her absorption. Taking the woman's rough brown hand in her soft white one, she patted it gently. The liquid Italian vowels fell from her smiling lips like a benediction. The peasants forgot their distress, for here was an angel sent from Heaven in answer to their prayers to the blessed Virgin. Sunshine lay in her warm kind eyes. *Ma che!* Thanks be to the saints, their troubles were at an end.

So it appeared. Their Heaven-sent angel turned to take them to her cab, and became for the first time aware that she was the focus of attention. Laughter lit her eyes as they swept the growing audience.

"Dear me! We're obstructing traffic." She turned to the man whose French had proved unequal to the occasion. "They are passing through to Los Angeles on their way to a son who is a truck gardener there. At the depot

they were robbed of every penny. Their train does not leave till six, so I'm going to take them to my rooms at the Savoy."

"Have they lost their tickets, too?"

"Yes."

"I will arrange for the tickets and have them sent to the hotel."

"I know they will wish to thank you when I tell them, but we really do not need to trouble you."

He shook his head, smiling at her. "No, that's my share. You can't kidnap them from me entirely. I spoke for them first. They are at least half mine."

Pinpoints of mirth gleamed in her eyes.

"Very well, since you insist. They want to catch the through Denver & Rio Grande. And now if you will be so good as to help us to the cab."

He opened a way for them through the press, helped her dispose of her confused and wondering protégés in the cab, then stood aside and watched her step in lightly after them.

Her crisp "Thank you" seemed to him to have exactly the right weight for the service he had rendered.

The cab rolled away, the crowd began to melt upon its many-minded business, and Richard Waller passed down the street to his office. He was still smiling when the elevator left him at the entrance to the elaborate suite of rooms bearing the sign of Martin, Drake and Waller. He could not rid himself of the deep impression her grace, her unconscious simplicity, and her wonderful eyes had made upon him. He knew her face for that of a free woman, frank and fearless. The thing she had done revealed her, just as had the one deep look she had given him. He wondered who she was. It would be easy to find out, but he had no intention of doing so. Deep hidden in him there lay a touch of the poetic temperament that gave something of chivalry to his solid strength. He would take her as he was sure she would wish to be taken, as a stranger who had joined hands with him in a kindness to those weaker than themselves.

Yet he did not intend to let this deter him from going to the train that afternoon. He was sure she would be there, and it would be altogether too parsimonious to deny himself the pleasure of seeing her again when he had clearly established a claim to be present.

Meanwhile the young woman had driven back to the Savoy and with her bewildered Tuscans had been shot up in an elevator to her apartments, where she was making her awed guests at home. They trod the polished floor and the soft rugs gingerly, even their exclamations hushed at the magnificence of furnishings which encompassed them.

The whimsical young woman who had taken charge of their affairs was as gay as a lark. Many a happy hour she had spent in their dear land of southern winds and blue skies. Often she had lingered to talk with just such quaint and simple people as these. America had been to them a land of dreams, a heaven-on-earth which welcomed the down-trodden and poured upon them its blessings and luxuries. It pleased her now to give these poor aliens one

hour in which their fairyland of dreams should be true before the workaday world closed in upon them again.

Their charmed eyes could do nothing but follow this amazing apparition who had come into their humdrum lives. Never before had they seen anything so exquisite and so wonderful. She seemed of ivory and of gold. Her skin was transparent, so that the glow of her rare color appeared to be driven from within. Abundant wavy hair which had harvested the gold of many sunbeams framed the pure white face and emphasized its delicate charm. *Altro!* Truly she was a miracle sent from above.

She had luncheon served in her own rooms. Dismissing her maid, she waited upon them herself and chatted of the Fatherland for which an hour ago they had been so homesick. Time flew for her as well as for them and the afternoon was well begun before she could bring herself to leave them for the duty she had been deflected from by meeting them.

She telephoned for a cab, drew on her gloves,

and was helped by her maid into a cloak. From the door she nodded a cheerful farewell.

"I shall be gone not more than an hour or two," she promised her guests. "Don't be uneasy. I shall get you down to the train in time."

"Si, signora," they smiled together in complete confidence.

To the driver of the motor cab she gave orders to take her to the Continental Building and wait.

At the third floor of the Continental Building she left the elevator. All about her were lettered doors indicating officials of the great Consolidated Fuel & Steel Company, but the one for which she looked was not in sight. From a young man passing with a sheaf of typewritten matter she inquired for the office of Mr. Steel. He gave a quick look at this young woman who wanted to see "the old man," decided that she was important enough to receive a personal direction, and conducted her down the corridor to a door upon which was printed:

"President Consolidated Fuel & Steel Company."

She gave her card to a clerk in the outer office. He asked her to be seated and disappeared through an inner door.

CHAPTER II

A BROKEN PACT

THE door of the private office opened, and Adam Steel himself stood on the threshold. In spite of what she had come to do the first impulse of the young woman was of pride in the sheer vital force that made him one out of a hundred. Well into the grizzled fifties though he was, age had not encroached upon his gnarled strength. The keen hawk eyes with shaggy overhanging brows, the close, straight lips, the lean muscular effect of well-packed power in the big frame, all declared him in his magnificent prime. He moved forward lightly, her welcome in the light of his contained face.

"Perhaps I ought not to have come. You are busy." She spoke with a touch of doubt in the exquisitely modulated voice.

"I am always busy, but never too busy to be glad to see Miss Nora Lyndon. Come in."

He followed her into the large plain office from which the destinies of the great Consolidated Fuel & Steel Company were directed, nodding carelessly to his private secretary. That young man gathered the papers upon which he had been busy and made an immediate exit.

It was characteristic of Nora Lyndon that she came directly to the object of her call. "I wanted to see you to-day. I couldn't wait. And I knew you were going down to Colorado Springs to-night."

"I am glad you came. My time is always yours when you want it, my dear." He said it so quietly, so much as a matter of course, that one would never have guessed the pulse of delight his slender visitor stirred in him.

From her handbag she took a newspaper clipping. "I read it two hours ago. Tell me it isn't true."

His eyes met the appeal in hers before he let them fall upon the paper in his hand. He knew already what he would see, an editorial from the *Press,* a yellow journal just now de-

voting itself to attacks upon him and the corporation he had built. That a serious issue was about to be raised between him and Nora he did not doubt. Steel decided to stand his ground boldly.

"Yes, it is true that suits have been filed against us and against the C., D. & M. Railroad for rebating. Of course the article is written with animus. The *Press* wanted me to buy its silence and I declined."

"But is it true that you got rebates? Is it true that your company closed independent mines and ruined their owners by that means?"

"It is true that I took the only way open to stop the cut-throat competition which was destroying us all. Yes, that is true."

"And you broke the law to do it?"

"I have broken many laws in my time without the least hesitation," he told her grimly.

"Yes, I understand. You were building a great industry out here in the desert. There were times when you had to ignore the rules that bind lesser men. But was it necessary to fight unfairly against those smaller competi-

tors who were also trying to build up their companies?"

She could see the hard lines around the corners of his mouth grow more set. "Absolutely necessary. I did what all men must do in this age to succeed in a large way. Our legislatures continually make laws that hamper business. They are composed of narrow-gage men. This country could not be prosperous if we respected all their crazy statutes. Napoleon once said he couldn't make an omelet without breaking eggs. It's just as true that one can't build a great corporation without strewing in its wake the wreckage of competitors. It used to be said that competition was the life of trade. Well, the world moves. Now it is the death of it. Economy, efficiency of management, the elimination of duplication: these are the results of combination. I didn't make the laws of business life, but I have to abide by them if I'm going to survive."

He made his defence gravely, without a touch of defiance or apology in his manner, the steel gray eyes steadily on her. Even while

her heart sank she could not deny him her admiration. Cold and masterful to the last inch of him, he was a splendid specimen of the type which by its restless, insatiable energy has carried America to commercial supremacy.

"Look at the facts and judge them largely," he went on. "I came across the desert and built a great industry out of nothing. I have run railroads to our mines, have built cities and towns and given work to thousands for a generation. All this time I have fought for my life against the great trust in the East that was bent on ruining me to control the industry from sea to sea. Now mark what they mean to do: drive me to the wall and shut the mines and the mills I had started, let the great plant rust that I have given my life to set in motion. I wasn't fighting for myself alone, but for all these women and children dependent on the C. F. & S. Could I afford to be squeamish?"

"But these other independent operators——"

He beat her protest down, hammering a clenched fist into his open palm. "There was

just one way to beat the trust. I must control the situation here absolutely. I must be dictator of the whole Western field. There must be no local jealousies that would result in underselling. I had to swallow the small fry for the general good. Well, I made fair propositions to take them in with us. Some came. Some refused. I put these last out of business because I had to do it. Never mind about the methods. My omelet had to be made."

"And the story in the *Press*—it is quite true?"

"Substantially."

"That you crushed them without mercy, that one man committed suicide because you ruined him?"

"He ruined himself, but it is true he committed suicide."

She sat down in the chair he had drawn up for her and drew a long breath as if she had been running.

"I'm *so* sorry."

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"It makes *all* the difference."

"In what way?" He shot it at her roughly, his beetling brows gathered over the steely eyes.

"I can't do it. . . . I can't do it."

"You mean you can't marry me. Is that it?"

"Yes."

Always she had appeared to him a creature of a finer clay than ordinary mortals. The loveliness of her voice, of her eyes, the grace of her motions, haunted him as they did many men. With it all, too, she was so vitally alive, so quick of understanding and sympathy. Just now the glow and color were all out of the white face, but the purity of it went through him like a knife thrust.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Don't you see? It would spoil everything. I couldn't share a success won that way." Her eyes, soft as pansies, were full of tender pity even while they struck down his hopes.

"No, I don't see that. I am the same man I was yesterday."

"But not to me."

"Sentimentality! Don't judge me by the

Church creed standard. Take me for what I am, a man who has done his work in spite of all hindrances. Hasn't the work been worth while?"

"A great work, a very great one," she conceded eagerly.

"There was only one way to do it. Do you blame me because I was strong enough to choose it even though some fell by the wayside for the larger good?"

"No, I don't blame you," she answered gently.

"You judge me."

"No, I judge myself. How can I tell what is right and what wrong for you? Great things were in your horoscope. But I can't keep step with you."

"Why not?"

"I am not big enough. I have to live by the ordinary rules of morality that bind every-day people. It may be right for Titans and demi-gods to ignore them. It wouldn't be for me."

"Do I ask it of you?"

"Could we have any true partnership if I did not share your whole life?"

"You could not expect to share every detail of my business life."

"No, but I should have to know there were none you could not discuss with me if you wished."

It had been his custom to talk with her freely of his plans and hopes. She was the first woman he had ever known who seemed able to grasp them. Her sweet sympathy had been very dear to him. Now he saw her slipping from him, but of the dull ache gnawing at his heart he gave no sign, though never had she seemed more adorable than in this hour when she was breaking with him.

"Couldn't we have a difference of opinion and still be friends?"

She understood his gruffness and it made her the more tender toward him. Scarcely half his age, the mother in her was athrob with divine pity because of the hurt she was dealing.

"Don't you see that it was just because you had refused to use the methods of the trust

that I wanted to help you?" she cried. "They tried to crush you by all those unfair means. But you scorned their means and yet grew stronger. That was what I thought. If it had only been against them you used such weapons—but those innocent men you ruined. I can't forget them."

"Don't you see it was against the trust I was fighting? To beat it I had to force a consolidation of all the Western interests."

"But you had to do wrong to do right. I don't judge you . . . dear. But everything is changed for us. I wanted to stand by you while you fought, but I can't do that . . . now that the foundation of our fellowship is gone. Don't you see that, Adam?"

Her hands went out in an impulsive little gesture she stayed half way.

"Not unless you let it."

"But I can't help it. There is a wall between us now, one we can't break down or climb over. It isn't that I don't admire you still . . . or like you. But . . . we don't belong. Oh,

Adam! I'm sorry. You don't know how sorry."

He looked down upon this slim wonder of living ivory and gold, the dainty whimsical Eve who had at last brought love into his warring life, and the grim gray builder of states knew the futility of success and the bitterness of failure.

"You've made up your mind, then? You're going to throw me over?"

The tremble of her lip was for half a second only, but it made him feel as if he had struck her.

"You're quite sure of yourself, are you?" he went on in his even voice.

"I wish I weren't."

"That means you are."

"Yes." Her pity welled out in a little cry. "Oh, Adam! I want to stay friends with you."

A grim smile touched his lips. "Is it worth while? I think not."

She hungered to tell him all that was in her heart, how much she liked him, how great still was her respect for him as a man among

men. But he had denied her this comfort. He would have none of her friendship since he could have no more.

She rose. "Then there is nothing more I can say . . . except good-bye."

"That is all."

He took the little hand she proffered, and his face was hard as granite. Nora bit her lower lip to keep back the swift tears, turned to the door, and adjusted her veil to cover the emotion in her face.

As soon as she had passed from the room Steel sat down heavily in his chair. He stared straight before him with unseeing eyes. The door to happiness had been shut in his face. Every instinct in him protested against it. He had won her, won her from the host of younger admirers she had everywhere made. His clear vision told him that his money had had nothing to do with it. She had turned to him because of the masterful strength in him. All his days he had been a fighter. He had taken the world by the throat and shaken from it the things he had wanted.

Adam Steel knew that he was not the man to touch the fancy of the average young woman. The social art of making himself agreeable was no part of his mental equipment. But in the course of her brilliant career Nora Lyndon had met many who knew how to do this and nothing else. It was as much for what he lacked as for what he had that he had at first compelled her interest. That this had increased rather than diminished with acquaintance merely proved him worthy of it. Now after winning her he had lost her again. The event was a disaster too incredible for belief.

CHAPTER III

ROSALIND

FOR long he sat there motionless, dully conscious that a deadening blow had fallen upon him. He had been so strong, so virile, so self-sufficient, that never before had he associated age with himself. But now it came to him that he would soon be an old man. He felt tired and weary of the battle.

At last he pressed a button for his private secretary.

"Telephone for Mr. Waller, Miller. Tell him I want to see him at once," he gave orders.

Within a few minutes the youngest member of the firm of Martin, Drake & Waller was ushered into the office. It was, perhaps, because he happened to be the nephew and heir of Adam Steel that Richard Waller had charge of the Consolidated legal work, but those who knew him best were aware that no better lawyer could have been selected.

His uncle fixed upon him hard, inscrutable eyes that told nothing.

"I want my will changed, Dick. Have that codicil I inserted last spring cut out."

"The one leaving Miss Lyndon forty thousand shares of C. F. & S. stock?"

"Yes. I want it revoked." He dismissed the matter peremptorily. "I'm going to drive down to Colorado Springs to-day to line up our forces for the annual meeting. We've got Marsh beaten, though he made a great fight for control. Those convertible bonds nearly turned the trick for him. I want to be on the ground myself both to-day and to-morrow. I'll be back Thursday. Have the new will drawn up and ready to sign by that time."

Waller guessed that the engagement between his uncle and the actress must have been broken. Nor was he surprised. He had never met Nora Lyndon to his knowledge, since it had been in New York that Steel had been introduced and had later asked her to marry him. But various bits of information relative to her antecedents had drifted to him. She

had come unheralded out of the West five years before and taken the country by storm. He understood she had a manner of engaging innocence, in spite of the fact that even then her bark had been wrecked at least once on matrimonial seas. Dick had no personal acquaintance with young women of this profession, but he judged it safe to assume she was an adventuress who had snared the steel magnate for his money and prestige. The disparity in age was in itself evidence enough of this. He felt that his uncle was well out of an absurd and annoying entanglement.

They passed along the corridor to the elevator and thence to Seventeenth Street. A good many eyes turned to look at them, for one was the biggest commercial asset of the state and the other his heir presumptive as well as a rising lawyer in his own right. Each gave an impression of dynamic vigor. If Adam Steel had within the hour glimpsed his first vision of encroaching age nothing of this showed in his bearing. The sap of strength was in every movement, the consciousness of it back of every

glance from the bold eyes set deep beneath the grizzled brows. He swept his car around and sent it forward with a certainty of touch his chauffeur could not have excelled.

Waller looked at his watch, then turned briskly toward the station. The Salt Lake train was already made up and he passed through the gate to the tracks. The party he sought was in a tourist sleeper. The Italians had surrendered themselves to the care of their guardian angel, who was arranging with an eye to their comfort the many parcels with which immigrants encumber themselves.

"Let me lift that for you," Waller called as he came down the aisle.

The young woman turned, let the corners of her mouth dimple into a smile of recognition, and gave to him the heavy carpet-bag she had been trying to put under the seat.

"My Tuscans were beginning to be afraid you had forgotten the tickets," she said after he was through.

"But I sent a messenger to the hotel to say

I would bring them to the train. Didn't you get the message?"

"Yes. I knew you would be here. But you must remember that eighty dollars is as much as he earns in a year. Perhaps they concluded you had thought better of it."

"I brought a basket of fruit, but I see you have had a lunch hamper packed for them."

"I was just wishing I had put in more fruit." She turned to the foreigners and said something to them in Italian, whereupon they smiled and nodded upon Dick with faces wrinkled into creases of pleased gratitude.

The two sections of the train bumped together and the conductor sang out his "All aboard." Hurried good-byes were said and the lawyer helped his partner in philanthropy from the car steps. They walked across the tracks and through the station corridor to her cab. As it began to move she gave him a smile and her hand.

"Good-bye, Santa Claus."

The words and the smile flashed upon him

as if they had been born of an impulse warm and generous. For that moment at least she had taken him into her heart as a friend.

Waller's mind was so full of her that he chose to walk rather than ride to the University Club, where he had rooms and usually dined. He would not let himself believe that their acquaintance had terminated. A conclusion so tame to the delightful adventure would never do. He would meet her socially, he promised himself. She must be visiting in the city. If this were so there would be dinners and other functions in her honor, at some of which he would surely see her.

As he was crossing Broadway a billboard caught his eye.

NORA LYNDON

IN SHAKSPEAREAN RÉPERTOIRE

was what he read. It snatched him from his smiling revery. He had not known that the actress was in town. It came to him with a momentary surprise that she was playing

Shakspeare, for he recalled that she had made her reputation in comedy. The impulse took him to go see her, to find out what there was in her to attract a man like Adam Steel. He turned in at the boxoffice of the theater and bought a ticket.

"We're going to have the S. R. O. sign out, Mr. Waller. But you're in luck. A seat was just turned back to us," the man at the window explained.

"Didn't know there was such a revival of interest in Shakspeare."

"William is not responsible. There's an interest in any old thing when Nora Lyndon plays it."

"I've never seen her. Is she really so good?"

"You wait and see," the young man smiled confidently.

The lawyer reached the theater late and missed the entire first act and part of the second. He waited at the back of the house for the curtain to fall before going to his seat and meanwhile gave his attention rather listlessly to the stage. The bill was "As You Like It,"

the scene the one where the cousins come limping into the Forest of Arden.

Before he had drawn three breaths Waller's interest had quickened. Not since he had seen Julia Arthur in the part had so charming a Rosalind crossed his path. The tenderness and the roguery of it, the winsome boyish swagger that yet was so girlish, the eagerness and gayety and raillery, this actress brought them out as one who lived romance. He knew now what it was in her that had won the love of his uncle, just as it must have won that of many men. For surely no more charming woman under heaven was to be found than this gallant, light-footed Rosalind with the sweet caressing voice that played so tremulously on the heartstrings.

It always remained a surprise to him that he did not immediately recognize her, but he was too far from the stage to see her face clearly. Drawn back at the end of the act to acknowledge the persistent hand-clapping, she bowed with the touch of shy daring brought by her to the part. Recalled a second and a

third time, her happy smile reflected the waves of friendliness that swept across the footlights to her. It was as she retired into the wings that Dick knew her with a thrill of emotion for the heroine of the Tuscan peasants adventure.

The lawyer had scarcely taken his seat before an usher came down the aisle with a yellow envelope in his hand. Before the name reached him he could see that the boy was paging someone.

"Telegram for Mr. Richard Waller. . . . Telegram for Mr. Richard Waller."

The young man claimed the wire and ripped open the envelope. He read:

"Mr. Steel killed in accident. Car run into by freight engine. Bringing back body on No. 3."

It was signed by the chauffeur who had started with the president of the C. F. & S. to Colorado Springs less than four hours before.

CHAPTER IV

STURGIS MARSH

AS the nearest relative of the man who had been killed Waller made the necessary arrangements for the funeral before leaving Denver on the early morning train for Colorado Springs. He had expected to find the forces of Steel disorganized by the loss of their leader, but not to come upon them being swept from their position by the enemy.

Sturgis Marsh, leading the campaign on behalf of the great trust which was endeavoring to gain control of the C. F. & S., had ordered a general assault at the first news of Steel's death. He had been up all night, moving to and fro among the waverers, in turn bullying and cajoling them to get into line while there was yet time. He was prepared to buy stock if necessary, at a price set by himself. So confident of victory had he grown that the figure

offered was less than half what he had given a week ago.

With the arrival of Waller, Marsh became aware of a check. For when the troubled stockholders turned to Dick for advice he had accepted the responsibility with quiet strength.

"Don't sell. We're going to win," was the word he gave out resolutely.

C. F. & S. was a valuable stock, much more so than it had been a few years earlier. But if Marsh gained control the policy of the trust would probably be to close the mines and mills, which would reduce the value of the stock to next to nothing. The stockholders were on the horns of a dilemma. A refusal to sell meant an almost total loss if Marsh won. But to sell at the price offered was equivalent to making him a present of one-third the value of the stock, a quite unnecessary sacrifice if the old Steel faction was strong enough to hold its own.

Waller knew that if he won it would be a near thing. Already he had sent out a dozen telegrams to the owners of the stock whose

proxies Steel had held, asking that these be made out anew to Parker, the vice-president of the company. It would, too, be necessary for him to get an order from the court permitting him to vote the stock of the man who had just been killed. At best he would have a bare majority, how small a margin nobody knew but himself, not even the man who was hammering down the shares with threats to ruin the corporation.

Not for nothing had Marsh won his reputation as a financial buccaneer. There was no turn of the road he did not know. A plunger by instinct and training, he had given it out everywhere that he had come west to gain control of the big fuel and steel company. He had traveled in his special train, bringing with him his lawyers and the lieutenants who were to be the directors and the officers of the reorganized company. The expedition had been a picnic from the start, with champagne corks popping all the way. Failure now would be a blow to his prestige he could not afford. But he had no intention of failing. The sudden

death of Steel had opened the way to snatch victory out of defeat.

Before Waller had been two hours in Colorado Springs he was served with an order of the court to appear immediately and show cause why a writ of injunction should not be issued against the voting of the stock of Adam Steel until the settlement of the estate.

Dick had already arranged with his partner, Drake, to make proof of death before the Denver County Court and to file a bond for Waller, as administrator-to-collect of the estate, since he had been named in the will as executor. Meanwhile he hastened to court to present his argument against granting the writ.

The lawyers of the trust were laughing and talking together in high spirits. As soon as Waller came into the room one of the local attorneys leaned down and whispered to a ruddy-faced, jolly little man, who appeared to be the heart of the merriment.

The little man jumped to his feet and with the Colorado Springs lawyer trotted across to

the table where Dick was arranging his authorities.

"Mr. Waller, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Marsh," the lawyer said, and Dick found himself shaking hands with the most daring operator on Wall Street.

Fishy protuberant eyes, beneath which were puffy pouches, stared at the young man from full-blooded cheeks mottled with tiny veins.

"Glad to meet you, young fellow. Sorry we're backing different horses," Marsh sang out with the loud laugh that did not somehow strike the right note.

Waller read him shrewdly. He was, of course, a bully. All this premature gayety and the array of famous lawyers were intended to overawe the stockholders, the court, and the opposing counsel. But Dick had not lived his thirty-six years without knowing that the successful bluffer often holds a strong hand. The cards held by this man now were well-nigh invincible. The only saving feature was that he did not know how weak a hand Waller was covering.

"It is a difference of opinion that makes horse races—and lawsuits, Mr. Marsh."

The New Yorker laughed, almost insolently. "Come, young man. You're not telling me that there can be two opinions about how *this* case is coming out."

"Don't you have any hope of winning?"

"Not win!" the little man snorted. "Bet you a million we win. I expected Steel to give me some trouble, but now he is out of the way there is nothing to it."

"You have an optimistic temperament, Mr. Marsh," Dick smiled dryly.

"You've got the gall. Haven't I got the law and the lawyers? You fellows are tied up tighter than a soaked knot. Course you've got to make your play. It's what you're paid for. I understand that. But when you talk of winning—huh!"

Sturgis Marsh set his feet wide apart and jammed his hands into his trousers pockets, eyeing the young man as if he were some rare specimen in natural history caught for his especial benefit. Evidently he considered it

lèse-majesté for a mere provincial attorney to set up his opinion against him and his stellar troupe of New York lawyers.

A big good-looking young fellow in riding clothes sauntered into the courtroom and grinned amiably at the Wall Street operator.

"Hello, Dad! Got 'em on the run yet?" he asked.

"Got 'em crowded into the last ditch," his father retorted loudly, tugging down the bottom of the fancy vest that covered his plump stomach.

Dick was already plunged deep in his law books, making sure that his page references were correct.

The lawyers for the trust spoke at length. They asked an injunction against the voting of the Steel stock to prevent fraud and injustice.

Waller briefly reviewed the facts. He told of the assaults upon the C. F. & S. by the trust, of how Adam Steel had built up the company under a persistent hammering at its hands, and of how Marsh and his friends had repeatedly tried to get control with the sole purpose of

regulating the price of the output and the incidental intention of wrecking a great industry which fed more than forty thousand men, women, and children. Compared to the present conspiracy to ruin the Consolidated the deliberate destruction of a passenger train by bandits would be a misdemeanor. He asked that the injunction be refused, or at least that His Honor would grant twenty-four hours to gather evidence to show why the petitioners should be denied.

The judge declined to deny the injunction, but gave the defendants the time asked. In a matter of such importance he thought it only right that all the facts should be heard. He also thought, though he neglected to say so, that since he was a candidate to succeed himself at the next election he could not afford to stir up the people by showing any favor to the big Eastern capitalists whose success would menace the livelihood of thousands of workingmen in the state.

Marsh stopped Waller on the way out. "Think you've scored a point, young fellow, do

you? Just wait till to-morrow and watch us clip your comb. You'll not crow so loud then."

Dick's glance swept him from the pouched eyes and the bulldog jaw to the horsey waistcoat.

"We'll know by this time to-morrow how good a prophet you are, Mr. Marsh," he returned with a cool nod, and resumed at once his conversation with the large stockholder beside him.

Waller had taken a leaf from the book of Marsh. He too meant his manner of easy confidence to have its effect upon the assembled owners of the Consolidated stock. But he did not let his apparent assurance keep him from strengthening his fences hour by hour as the day passed. The proxies from absent stockholders were reaching him already. Over the long distance telephone he heard from Drake that it had been impossible to get the matter of an appointment of an administrator into court before the hour of closing, but arrangements had been made to have it taken up the first thing in the morning.

This was running it too fine to suit Dick, for the news of his appointment as administrator-to-collect must reach Judge Burns at Colorado Springs before the arguments as to the injunction were concluded and his decision announced. Otherwise Waller would lose, and if an injunction should be granted there would be no time to have it dissolved before the annual meeting in the afternoon. He decided to run back to Denver for another conference with Drake, for it would not do to have any cog in their plans slip. Moreover he had other business in that city. He wanted to see a young woman who owned forty thousand shares of C. F. & S. stock.

CHAPTER V

NORA LYNDON AT HOME

WALLER had taken it for granted that Miss Lyndon would give place to her understudy until after the funeral. It was therefore a little shock to learn that she was at the theater. He felt it to be an incongruous note, a lack of the fine delicacy he had expected of her.

"She might have given him this one night even if she did not love him," was his unvoiced criticism.

Nor when he had followed her from the hotel to the theater could he see that the tragedy which had so nearly touched her life affected her acting. The play was "Cymbeline," and her Imogen was an interpretation to take the breath with sweet delight. She had caught the very spirit of the English princess—her naïveté, her swift-reaching love, conjoined with

the high-hearted courage that has made her the best beloved of Shakspeare's galaxy of women.

At the first *entr'acte* Dick sent back to her a note with his card. He asked for a few minutes with her on very urgent business at the conclusion of the play. The usher brought back to him a reply penciled on the back of his own card.

"I shall be glad to see you at the Savoy after the play."

When Waller was shown to Miss Lyndon's apartments he found her resting on a lounge, but she rose at once as her maid brought him forward. An hour ago he had seen her as splendid youth, carrying herself with the easy grace of the fawn, the sun in her hair and her eyes and her heart. Now she was pure woman, the fine delicacy of her shaded almost to haggardness.

She moved forward to shake hands, and her eyes widened with surprise. The nephew of

Adam Steel was her partner of yesterday's adventure.

"Did you know me yesterday?" she asked after their first words of introduction.

"No. It happens I had never seen you act—not till last night. It has been my loss. I have very greatly enjoyed your Rosalind and your Imogen."

"I am glad," she said simply, and presented him to Mrs. Hiller, a middle-aged lady whose name he recalled having seen in the cast.

A table set for three was in the room, and the lawyer recognized the fact with a quasi-apology. "I'm keeping you and your friends waiting. I can say what needs to be said in three minutes, or if you prefer I can return later."

"But I expect you to stay for supper. I have heard Mr. Steel speak of you so often that I feel I know you. You will stay?"

She asked it with no embarrassment but with a touch of shyness in her pure sweet voice.

"I shall be very glad," he answered.

She was plainly tired, and the shadows be-

neath the eyes lent the white face a pathos unusual to it. He wondered whether she were mourning the man who yesterday had gone out of her life forever. Presently she began to speak of him, simply, quietly, recalling circumstances of their acquaintance, his many kindnesses to her, the difference his loss would mean to many lives.

"I was playing in 'Cymbeline' the night he first saw me. He was drawn to me and through a common friend met me next day. It was like him to take the trouble of arranging a meeting. When he wanted anything he went straight for it."

"Yes, that was his way," Dick agreed.

"We became friends at once. He was intimate with few, but he had a capacity for friendship." She fell into momentary abstracted silence. When her eyes came back to those of the lawyer there was in them a rainy smile. She spoke very softly and tenderly. "It was strange that the bill to-night was 'Cymbeline.' If it had been anything else—but I couldn't think it mere chance. I played it for

him. All through the evening I thought of him, and of how it would have given him pleasure if. . . . It was all I could do."

"Perhaps he knows you did it for him," Dick suggested, greatly touched.

"I shall like to think he does."

Mrs. Hiller was called into the next room to the telephone and Nora Lyndon took the chance to make confession.

"I hurt him yesterday . . . a great deal . . . and, as it turned out, so needlessly. If I could only have known I might have spared him. And now it is too late."

She was crying ever so softly. Dick was aware of a desire to comfort her in a simple fashion forbidden him. But he thought of another way, one that fell pat with his reason for calling.

"No, it is not too late. You can still do something he would have valued a great deal."

Her eyes were fixed upon him. She asked no questions, but waited an explanation.

"You know he built his life into the Consolidated. It was his great work, though he

did many big things to buttress it that would have been great in a lesser man."

Still silent, she nodded her understanding.

"The company has been attacked persistently. Often he had to take big chances in expanding so as to keep the trust out of his territory. Two years ago he issued convertible bonds to raise money to buy in the northern coal fields. These bonds were bought in largely by the trust. A determined effort is now being made by Sturgis Marsh to get control."

"By Sturgis Marsh," she echoed in startled surprise.

"Yes. He is the representative of the big financiers back of the trust. My uncle had them beaten. But he died two days too soon. At the news of his death his associates began to weaken, for he has always been the backbone of the Consolidated. Someone had to take hold of the situation. Since his will names me as executor, I have done so."

"I am glad. You will beat them," she prophesied, for she sensed in him something of

the same largeness of view and driving power that had attracted her in his uncle.

"Not without your help."

"How can I help?" she asked, surprised.

"By my uncle's will you are left 40,000 shares of C. F. & S. stock."

An exclamation that was almost a groan fell from her lips. "I am so sorry."

In anybody else such a regret would have seemed insincere. Two million dollars is a legacy that no woman, however high-minded she is, will look at with aversion. But in the case of Nora Lyndon he felt the regret in keeping with her character.

"I can't take it. You don't understand." She gave him fine, serious eyes direct. "I broke our engagement the very day he was killed."

He took her statement as if it had been news. "You must take time to think it over. There are reasons——"

"No. I deliberately denied him any share in my life, even though he loved me. I shut him out from me . . . and he went away . . . to

be killed. I can't repudiate my own act. I couldn't accept this and keep my self-respect."

"Then you can return it to the estate later, but just now you must take it. I must have that stock to vote or Sturgis Marsh will ruin the work my uncle gave his whole life to build."

"What must I do?"

"You must go into court to-morrow morning and join in the petition to have me appointed administrator-to-collect of the estate. If this is not done my uncle's stock cannot be voted."

"Very well. You'll have the papers drawn up?"

"Yes. Mr. Drake, my partner, will go over the matter with you in the morning."

"But it's understood I'm taking the stock only temporarily?"

"Yes, if you like."

"What else can I do to help?"

"Sign this paper. It gives me the right to vote your stock for you at Colorado Springs."

She took the document from him and turned away with the swift elastic tread of a wood nymph. Through the curtained doorway she

passed to her traveling writing desk. But almost instantly she reappeared to ask another question. Standing in the half gloom, tall, slender, and straight as an aspen, with eyes that were the wonder of her world shining out of the transparent face, she might have stirred an imagination far more sluggish than his.

"You are quite sure this is what he would want me to do?"

"I am quite sure, but I want you to be sure too. If you have any doubt call up Mr. Parker or Mr. Lander. They are officials of the company and were entirely in my uncle's confidence."

"No. If you say so that is enough," she answered decisively.

After she had returned with the signed paper she made one condition. "Please tell Mr. Marsh that I do this because I think it right and for no other reason."

He promised, wondering what relation she could hold to the Wall Street operator. Almost immediately her explanation followed.

"He is my father-in-law, you know."

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST BATTLE

AS he walked from the Savoy to his offices Waller pieced out the story bit by bit. A few years earlier the newspapers had been full of it, but his memory recalled vaguely only the main points: the infatuation of Sturgis Marsh, Jr., for the young actress, his pursuit of her across two continents, their subsequent marriage, the stories that began to leak out about his wild follies.

Dick remembered that the public had protested extravagantly against the young wife giving up her stage career. She had done so to hold her dissolute husband steady, the papers said. From bad to worse young Marsh had gone, acquiring an unsavory reputation as the fastest of the fast. The end had come like a bolt from a blue June sky. Driving home from an unspeakable revel with some boon compan-

ions, his car had run off a bridge and the young man had been picked up dead. A year later his wife had returned to the stage under her old name.

No doubt the accident of yesterday had brought back to her mind that other one of four years ago. The shadow of sad memories had been on her face. She needed cheering, taking out of herself. Instantly there came to Dick's mind a picture of the person he knew best fitted to summon cheerful smiles. He wrote a note to Tessie Steel and asked her to call on Miss Lyndon.

The night he spent in consultation with his law partners and with the C. F. & S. officials. When gray morning began to lighten the sky Waller returned to his rooms, took a cold bath, and was driven to the station. Breakfast he ate in the diner, after which he obliterated his surroundings and gave his mind wholly to the argument to be presented to Judge Burns.

Before he knew it the train was rolling into Colorado Springs. He took a taxi for the hotel which was the headquarters of his faction and

blew in upon the worried stockholders like a breath of mountain air. There were moments when Dick scarcely dared hope that the doubtful factors would all dovetail to produce success, but no hint of anxiety reached the surface. He radiated a quiet, cheerful buoyancy, appeared so much the master of the situation that his followers drew renewed courage from him.

Just as he was setting out for the courthouse, Parker, the vice-president of the company, hurried in with a face of doom.

"Durand has played traitor. He has sold his stock to Marsh."

In the moment of dead silence that followed each man looked at his neighbor and wondered who could be trusted. Suspicion was in the air, and with it a furtive question whether the Wall Street wrecker would still buy.

Dick's easy smile saved the day. "I could have told you yesterday he meant to sell, Parker. Let him go. We don't need his stock. While I was in Denver last night I picked up forty thousand shares we didn't have before."

"Forty thousand shares," echoed the vice-president. "In Heaven's name, where?"

"That's a secret just now. The point is that I have the proxies in my pocket. Marsh is beaten if we stand pat."

Waller did not think it wise to explain just now that the forty thousand shares were part of those belonging to the Steel estate, nor did he add that they would be of no use in case the injunction should be granted.

His whole purpose was to play for time. He wasted a preliminary half hour arguing that the court had no jurisdiction. Beaten here, as he expected to be, he moved with needless prolixity that the court dismiss the request without argument. The lawyers for the trust fell into his trap and wrangled the point out with him. Waller was noted for the trenchant, clean-cut style in which he was used to hammer home his authorities, but now his talk was wordy and discursive. He had wasted an hour and a half when Judge Burns interrupted to set a time limit for the arguments.

A telegram was handed to Waller. He read

it while one of the New York lawyers was suavely tearing to ribbons the argument he had constructed.

"You have been appointed administrator-to-collect. Messenger on way to Springs with order of court."

Drake's name was signed to the wire.

While his opponents talked Dick sat on the anxious seat. It was all a question of time now. If he could stave off the decision of Burns until the court order from Denver arrived he stood a good chance of winning. Every minute brought the crisis nearer. He interrupted the argument of Marsh's most noted attorney to correct at unnecessary length a mistake as to the facts which was of no importance. He overstepped his own time and could hardly be persuaded to give up the floor. Just as Judge Burns began to announce his decision a young man from Waller's office ran into the room and thrust a paper into his hands.

Instantly Dick rose to his feet. Waves of

exultation surged through his blood, but he held his voice steady.

"May it please the Court, I desire to offer new and important matter." Before the judge could pass adversely on his request he added: "I desire to withdraw entirely the argument submitted by me and to substitute for it one fact. I have been appointed administrator-to-collect of the Steel estate at request of the heirs in order to protect their interests pending a settlement of the estate."

His crisp voice rang like a bell through the room. Even those dull loungers who make a business of frequenting courtrooms knew that something important had happened. Into the eyes of the great lawyer sitting beside Marsh flashed the flag of defeat, but almost instantly he was on his feet suave and urbane as ever in his smiling objections.

The fight was on again, but this time the trust forces were on the defensive. Waller, terse, confident, sure of his ground, drove home the very arguments of his opponents.

"Application for an injunction, Your Honor,

admittedly rests upon the claim that the estate of the late Adam Steel has not yet been admitted to probate. The stock owned by him can be voted only by a legally appointed administrator, counsel for the appellant have ably maintained. Let it be granted the contention is well founded. I now ask that the injunction be denied because an administrator-to-collect has been appointed by the court to safeguard the interests of those inheriting under the will."

Dick stepped forward and handed to Judge Burns the order of the Denver County Court. The latter adjusted his glasses and read the document carefully. Having finished, he turned it over to the chief counsel for Marsh.

That gentleman was on his feet sparring for time. "Your Honor can see that this whole thing is a palpable trick. At the last moment, after wasting a great deal of valuable time of the Court, counsel for the defendants shifts ground to reopen the whole matter. I submit, Your Honor——"

Burns, nettled at the implication that he had been the dupe of Waller, barked out a decision.

"Counsel for the petitioners will have thirty minutes to show cause why the application should not be denied."

Waller knew then that he had won. A half hour later Judge Burns refused the injunction sought.

Marsh broke into a jangling laugh, rose, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and voiced his irritated chagrin.

"Bilked, by Jove! Next time I'll bring some real lawyers with me."

He turned on his heel and made his way from the room. Outside he met the radiant Wellington, just returning from a tennis match he had won.

"Hello, Dad! All right, is it?" he called.

"All wrong," roared his father. "These nincompoop lawyers of ours let this shyster draw the wool over their eyes. The injunction's refused."

He got into his car and drove furiously away, letting his aides follow as best they might. It was engaging little traits like this

that so endeared Sturgis Marsh to his associates.

His son watched him disappear in a cloud of dust down the street. The young man smiled apologetically toward the lawyers. "Dad's a model of courtesy when he's wearing a grouch," he admitted ruefully.

But Sturgis Marsh did not dare to allow himself long the pleasure of a tantrum. It was imperative that he shift the ground of his attack and he did. Inside of the hour, while Waller was still receiving the jubilant congratulations of his associates at the hotel, a bellboy announced that he was wanted at the telephone.

The lawyer emerged from the booth smiling. "Marsh wants to see me on very important business at his headquarters," he announced openly.

A grizzled stockholder shot a quick look at him. "And you said?"

"That I was too busy to come; that if he wanted to see me and Mr. Parker here we could give him just ten minutes. He didn't like it, but he is on his way up."

"What does he want?"

"Wants to buy us off."

Dick's frankness had killed any germinating suspicion. It was impossible for his associates to doubt him now.

He had guessed right. The Wall Street operator presently swaggered in wearing the usual horsey raiment that distinguished him. If his smile was a made-to-order one at least it served well enough.

"Mornin', Waller. Glad to meet you, Perkins. Well, you pulled off your little trick all right. Congratulations. Mighty slick play. I'll say that for it even though you can't make it stick in the courts."

"It will stick until to-morrow, Mr. Marsh," retorted Parker acidly. He did not relish being called Perkins, as if his name were not worth remembering.

Marsh nodded. "You've got me there. This young man has blocked me temporarily. He played his cards for all there was in them. I'd hate to sit opposite him at poker if he can bluff the way he did this morning."

"Happy in your praise, I'm sure," Dick nodded. Behind his smile he was very wary and alert.

"But you want to remember I'm only checked —not within a thousand miles of being beaten. We're on the first lap, my friends. Don't forget that. I always win in this kind of a game, even if I have to stack the cards. You know who is with me in this fight—the biggest men in the United States. Understand?"

Waller nodded.

Marsh put his feet on an extra chair and lit a cigar, having first offered his case to the others. "Well, you made your little play and got away with it. Now the point is, what do you want? We'll do what's right by both of you and take care of your friends in reason."

It was refreshing to see the air the checkmated freebooter gave himself. He fairly exuded condescension.

"We want the fruits of victory—president, officials, and board of directors."

The New Yorker shook his head. "That won't do at all. You don't get my point. We'll

take care of you personally and you turn over the control to us."

"Yes?"

"I'll take you both East with me where big things are doing. You're wasted here, Waller. You too, Perkins."

"Parker," suggested the owner of that name.

"To be sure, Parker. Well, here's my idea. We'll put you at the head of our legal department, Waller, and find a fat place for Mr. Parker. What say?"

Dick beamed on him. "Speaking for myself, that I'm very grateful."

Marsh interrupted him with a magnificent wave of his hand. "Not at all. You've earned promotion. You made a bully fight—a bully fight. I know a good man when I see one."

"I was going to say," continued the lawyer, "that while we appreciate your interest in us we are compelled to decline. We intend to keep control of the C. F. & S. ourselves."

"You can't do it. I'll see that we win next year. I'll attend to that personally."

"I thought you attended to it personally this time."

"You can bet your last dollar I win next time. But you won't have to wait till then. I'll put your company out of business before six months are up."

"Will you? That's your opinion. Now hear mine. We mean to keep control both next year and the next. The mines and the foundries of the Consolidated are going to keep running in spite of you and your friends. This company was built in the West. It belongs to the West. Forty thousand Westerners get their living through it. I say to you, hands off. We're not going to let you make a junk heap out of this enterprise. If it's fight you want, by God! you'll have your fill of it."

Dick spoke without raising his voice, without moving so much as an inch, but the ring of steel was in his words and the gleam of it in the steady eyes that chiseled into the furious ones of Marsh.

With an oath the New Yorker sprang to his feet. "All right. You've had your chance.

Remember that when you're kicked out a broken man, you two-for-a-cent pettifogger. Think you've won a big victory, do you? I'll show you how big it is. I'll hammer you and your damned company into smithereens or my name ain't Sturgis Marsh."

"In the meantime we'll not take any more of your time, Mr. Marsh, if you are quite through," Dick suggested blandly.

"Busy, are you? Huh! You'll have time enough on your hands before I'm through with you," sneered the purple-faced little man. "You're both going to be on the street."

He stormed out of the room and down the corridor to the elevator. Parker looked at Waller dubiously. After all was it the wise thing to anger so powerful an opponent?

Dick took it with a careless laugh.

"Exit Mr. Morse, his special train, his star corps of lawyers, and a carful of disappointed leeches that were to have settled themselves on the Consolidated."

"Then you think he's beaten?"

"Beaten." Waller's smile faded before the

grim hardness of the fighting look. "No, I don't think he has begun yet. This is the first round. We've stung him up a bit. He'll come back strong. Don't make any mistake about that. We're going to have the fight of our lives, Parker. But if he throws us on the scrap heap he'll know he's been fooling with a buzz saw anyhow. Let's go to lunch."

CHAPTER VII

TESSIE MAKES A CALL

MISS TESSIE STEEL was dividing her attention between a box of chocolates, a special delivery letter that had just reached her, and the conversation of her bosom friend, Selma Glendinning.

"It's from Dick," she announced. "You'd perfectly never guess what he wants."

"I can guess *who* he wants," laughed Miss Selma mischievously.

"Oh, you can guess! So can I. But we don't *know*."

"Why, you told me——" Selma paused in selecting another chocolate to look her statement.

"Oh, he *thinks* he wants me, but he doesn't seem exactly *devastated* by love."

Miss Tessie was given to bubbling. She effervesced in speech and manner with a pretty

brightness that seemed born of the surcharged vitality dwelling in her soft round body. Italicized words leaped impetuously from her every sentence.

"But he's engaged to you, isn't he?" her friend commented.

"It's an experiment, my dear. Nothing more."

"I've heard that about marriage."

"Well, ours is an *experimental* experiment, then. And I'm not sure we're even engaged. Up to Tuesday we were, but then we had a quarrel—no, I had the quarrel and he laughed at me. Whatever can you do with a lover that won't quarrel? Could one *possibly* be happy with him for a husband? Wouldn't the salt just perfectly all be gone from life?" Tessie burlesqued despair and slipped another chocolate between her inordinately red lips.

"And what is it he wants?" Selma asked with a little nod at the note.

"He wants me to call on Miss Lyndon. She was engaged to my cousin, Adam Steel, you know. Dick thinks I ought to go and see her."

"Think of calling on the great Nora Lyndon. Shall you go?"

"Go! I'll *fly* to obey my lord. Haven't we worshipped her ever since we were school girls? I wouldn't miss it for a new car of the *very latest* model, self-starter, four-speed transmission, the one I've been dreaming about. I'm going to fall at her feet and offer the homage of my *rare* and *undying* devotion."

With Tessie to intend doing a thing she wanted to do was a call to immediate action. She began to dress at once, assisted by Selma, in a flutter of excitement lest her choice of costume should offend the fastidious taste of the great Miss Lyndon. She need have been under no apprehension, since in any gathering she was likely to be quite the best-gowned as well as most attractive girl in the room.

The name on her card won her instant admission to Miss Lyndon. The actress came forward with a grave sweet smile and offered her hand.

"You are related to Adam Steel," she said in the tone of a question.

"I am his cousin's daughter. Dick Waller asked me to call. We are the only relatives, and Dick thought it would be right you should ride in our carriage to the cemetery if you will. I hope you'll go with us, Miss Lyndon."

"I shall be very glad. It is kind of you both."

"It was Dick thought of it. He's perfectly all right about doing nice things. You'll see that when you meet him."

"I met him last night after the play."

"Oh! So that's how he came to write me. But I thought he was at Colorado Springs."

"He came up in the evening on business. It was necessary to see me about some stock. I understood he was going back this morning."

Tessie nodded. "Yes. The election of officers in the old company is to-day. All the papers are full of it. The trust is acting just horrid, Dad says."

"So I have heard."

"Did Dick tell you all about it?" The girl's eyes flashed. Her buoyant temperament was beginning to override her awe of the famous

actress. "I *do* hope Dick wins. It's the most *scandalous* thing, the way those pirates are trying to ruin this country. They ought to be *shot,* every last one of them, then maybe next time they would stay at home and not bring their horrid old special train out here."

"You believe in capital punishment for them, then," Miss Lyndon smiled.

"I believe in—in *transmogrification* for people of that sort," Tessie replied with such energy that both laughed at her extravagance. "Not that I've the *least* idea what that means, but it *sounds* the right punishment," she added gaily.

"To have Mr. Steel's policy carried out means a great deal for this part of the country. I hope Mr. Waller will win. I think he will. He impresses me as being strong and resourceful."

"Oh, Dick's a rock," conceded the young woman who was experimentally engaged to him. "I like him. He's a splendiferous good fellow. But he's miles bigger than poor me.

Dick's going to be a great man some day." And Tessie nodded her head sagely in prediction.

Nora delayed her answer long enough to receipt for a telegram just delivered her by a bellboy. She excused herself, tore it open, and read the message through. Then she turned smilingly to the girl.

"He has begun to be a great man already. This message is from him. He says that at the annual election this afternoon the policy of his uncle has been sustained. He and his friends have won a complete victory."

Tessie clapped her hands in excitement. "Isn't that just the *darlingest* news? Dick's a pippin. I just perfectly knew he would win."

It was not until later that she reflected upon one odd feature of the case. The first word of his victory went to Nora Lyndon and not to Tessie Steel. But Dick's fiancée was not of a jealous disposition. She dismissed this circumstance with a smile.

"Anyhow, I'm just glad he won. He's an old dear."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAY OUT

STURGIS MARSH did not depart so immediately as Waller had predicted. His collection of high-priced lawyers and disappointed officeseekers left on the special, in dudgeon both at themselves and at him, but neither their chief nor his son was with them. The Wall Street operator had not given up the fight. His grand assault had failed. Like the good soldier he was, he sat down to besiege the citadel.

His first move was to ask for the appointment of a receiver for the C. F. & S. on the ground that it was insolvent and its affairs being mismanaged. The application was denied. On the same day the Associated Press dispatches announced that the Government had decided to push vigorously the rebate cases pending against the company and had instituted other suits for like offences. Through

confidential sources it came to Dick that the influence of the trust with the administration at Washington was responsible for this sudden access of energy. C. F. & S. stock fell off several points, but this indirectly strengthened the management by making it possible for Waller to get control of a bunch of stock at a lower rate than had been quoted for years.

For some days Dick had noticed by the papers unusual activity in the stock of the Denver & Rocky Mountain railroad, the line which connected with most of the mines of the Consolidated. Yet it came to him as a blow without warning that Sherwin, the head of the great steel trust for which Marsh had been acting as agent, had with his associates bought a controlling interest in the D. & R. M. with the intention of making it a part of the great North Central Pacific system owned by the same group of capitalists.

The expected followed. Within the week the Consolidated received notice of a new rate on ore and coal for the mountain division that made shipment impossible except at a loss.

It was a knockout blow. The C. F. & S. works were shut off from the mines that fed them. The company had of course an appeal to the Interstate Commerce Commission, but that meant a delay of years, long before the end of which the company would be forced to surrender. Even if by some miracle the Consolidated should hold on and win the suit, the railroad operators could cripple the business by a continued shortage of cars.

All day Waller wrestled with the problem and found no answer, so that it was no wonder Tessie found him preoccupied when he called that evening to take her to a concert. In due time she called him to account.

"Maybe you don't know it, but I'm used to having young men pay the *strictest* attention to what I say, Mr. Waller."

He shook himself out of his abstraction and came to smiling attention.

"Beg pardon. Business worries, my dear. Now I'll be good."

"You may begin by telling me what was troubling you," she ordered.

Out of an impulse to see whether she could understand the gravity of it he told the cause at length. In the energy of her italicized sympathy he found amusement if not comfort.

"Somebody ought to *amalgamate* that Mr. Marsh with a baseball bat. The idea of him making you so much trouble. He's too *obstructive* for any use. I'm going to tell Welly Marsh to disinherit his father."

Tessie was given to the letter-writing habit, and after the concert she sat down in a kimona and poured herself out to her new friend, Nora Lyndon, who was playing Salt Lake on her return from San Francisco.

Two days later Dick received a wire from the actress that set him wondering.

"If answer has not yet been found to D. & R. M. ore schedule problem, meet me at Salida, 12:45 P. M., Wednesday."

No solution had been found, though Waller and his allies had racked their brains for one. What Miss Lyndon could have to tell him he could not imagine, but he had confidence

enough in her judgment to take the trip to Salida as told.

Miss Lyndon met him on the platform of her private car. Her firm little hand rested an instant in his before she led the way inside.

"I wasn't sure whether you would come or not," she said over her shoulder. "One may suppose you hesitated a good deal before yielding to so strange a request."

"Not for a moment," he answered promptly.

"At least you were surprised when you got the wire." With a nod she indicated to him a chair and herself took another. "The most amazed man in Denver, weren't you?"

"I'll admit the surprise."

She let him have the rare gay smile he had thought so winsome in her Rosalind. "Confess that you are dying of curiosity, Mr. Waller."

"Of curiosity and other emotions. An X-ray photograph of my mind would show me a composite of several."

"To particularize?"

"Well, chagrin—and despair—and a new faint hope—just to mention a few."

"DID YOU EVER HEAR OF THE PTARMIGAN PASS CUT-OFF PROJECT?"

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"Why chagrin?"

"After one has posed to half the cartoonists of the country as the David who slew the trust Goliath it's a comedown to be forced into surrender at the second brush."

"You're not beaten yet. There is a chance at least."

He smiled. "Glad to hear it. The faint hope I mentioned begins to glow. By the way, you understand the situation, don't you? We're shut off from our mines by impossible freight rates."

In her direct, unhurried fashion, head tilted just a trifle to one side, she pointed a question. "Did you ever hear of the Ptarmigan Pass cut-off project?"

He too took his time before answering. "Didn't the Transcontinental engineers survey a line across the pass and condemn it as not feasible? It was years ago, I remember."

"Yes."

"That was my impression. Has that project anything to do with the present situation?"

"Everything to do with it. The engineers of the Transcontinental were wrong."

This stung him to an intelligent alertness. "How do you know?" he asked bluntly.

"Mr. Steel told me. He had a private survey made by one of the most eminent railroad builders of the country. I forget the man's name. But it was made at great expense and very carefully, for your uncle expected to be confronted some day with the condition that now faces you. The Transcontinental engineers made the mistake of following the wrong fork of some river. Mr. Steel said that the cut-off from Black Diamond is quite possible as to grades, that there is not the least doubt of it. Among his papers you will find maps and statistics covering the point."

"And Uncle Adam contemplated building a line from Black Diamond to Denver across the divide?"

"Yes, he said he would do it when the Sherwin interests got control of the D. & R. M., and that would be only a question of time. It would

cost a lot to build, he said. I've forgotten how much."

Dick's eyes were shining with excitement. He rose and began to pace the car. Already his active mind was shaping events to the end he desired. With such a cut-off built and the stock in possession of his friends he could defy Marsh and Sherwin to do their worst. It would put the Consolidated in an impregnable position, for it would cut off a long expensive haul and would bring the mines to Denver's back door. The opportunity was a magnificent one, if the pass were really practicable and he man enough to hammer the line through.

He had forgotten Nora Lyndon entirely, until his eye fell upon her sitting there so still and watching him with that shadow of a contented smile on her face. He owed the chance to her. Somehow that reflection filled him with a strange delight.

Striding to her, he caught her hands in his. "You've shown me the way out. It's up to us now. Watch us make good."

That touch of the boy in him pleased her.

She nodded her gallant golden head. Only her eager sparkling eyes betrayed her excitement.

He sat down and began to talk, to develop the possibilities as he saw them. She listened, full of appreciation and interest, her face responsive to the mobility of his. The way he handled big ideas and made himself master of them reminded her of his uncle, but this man was of a finer, less ruthless quality than Adam Steel had been. To meet the spark of idealism in him her brave spirit went out straight as an arrow.

At luncheon they made a quartette. Mrs. Hiller he had already met. Warren Harshaw, the leading man of the company, proved an interesting type, the more so because actors were not among Dick's familiars. A slenderly built dashing young fellow, Harshaw had the touch of impetuosity that went well with the rather careless grace of his carriage. Set off by a remark of Miss Lyndon, he expounded his touch- and-go impressionistic philosophy of the drama.

"No, no. It's not a tragedy at all, only a

tawdry melodrama," he insisted of a play that was having a long run in New York. "The play that makes you feel the struggle between the individual and his environment is the true tragedy. There has to be something more at stake than life, as Brunetière says. We all feel that when we see a great actor in a great play. The struggle of the soul is the thing. If you don't feel that its value is lost to you."

He bowed his curly head to Miss Lyndon, as if asking for her endorsement, but with a hint of independence in his deference the lawyer found charming.

Nora Lyndon clapped her hands softly. "Every word of it true. But I would go farther and say its value *is* its effect upon you. If it isn't wholesome, if it doesn't purify life and thought, then it isn't a great play."

He shook his head smilingly. "There's your old heresy again, Miss Lyndon. You know I can't agree. Art tells the truth. It doesn't preach a sermon, except in the incidental way that all of life does."

"But the truth art tells must be a worth while

truth. I don't mean conventional truths of course. Most of those are at bottom lies. I'm all for freeing the stage, just as I am for freeing our lives. But let us be sure our freedom takes us into the light and not into darkness."

Waller delighted in the eagerness with which she gave battle. She was alert, aglow, absorbed in a minute; a creature of fire and dew inhabited by Stevenson's "certain ardor of the soul." Her talk was pungent she herself a well of delight to the listener.

Dick walked with her to the Savoy after they reached Denver. It was her suggestion that they walk, since she had been shut up all day from the chance of exercise. They passed under the "Welcome" arch and up Seventeenth Street.

The lawyer, young enough still to feel the sensuous joy of his own strength, carried his weight lightly as a schoolboy but with the certainty of a trained boxer. In her too he sensed the joy of young strength. Erect as Diana, she was deep-bosomed in spite of her slenderness. Her motions charmed, and at every steady step

the close skirts clung to her knees and molded themselves anew. Again Waller was made to feel that the outstanding note of her was that of radiant freedom.

In the hotel lobby they parted.

"You will let me know. You will tell me what comes of it," she asked.

"I shall come to you whenever they get me with my back to the wall, and in the intervals between whenever we need advice."

After dinner he went directly to the office that had been Steel's and spent hours looking for the papers he wanted. At last he found in the safe the report and the surveys of Redruth, the famous engineer who had done the work for Steel. The rest of the night he spent studying them and a plan of action. Morning found him ready for the fray.

CHAPTER IX

THE BALL IS STARTED ROLLING

WALLER sent for his partner Drake, an enterprising man of fifty with a well-shaped head as bald as a billiard ball. He had been in Butte trying a case and was not fully informed as to the latest C. F. & S. developments.

In a half dozen sentences Dick outlined the situation for him.

"They've got a strangle hold on us," he concluded. "Without the D. & R. M. we can't get our ore down from Black Diamond. We're cut off from our base of supplies."

"The rate they propose is really prohibitive then?"

The junior partner tossed the schedule across to him. "Look for yourself. You see it is more than the traffic will bear. It practically comes to this. We've got to go out of business —*or do without the D. & R. M.*"

Caught by some emphasis on the last clause, Drake looked quickly across the table. "Do without it! What do you mean?"

Dick let him have his audacious intention with a smile almost jaunty. "I mean, build a cut-off from Black Diamond to Denver. I mean strike at their business as Sherwin and his crowd have at ours. We can save one hundred and fifty miles by coming straight across the divide at Ptarmigan Pass and following the valley of the Muddy. We'll push through from Black Diamond in the other direction and connect with the Transcontinental at Rifle. Do you see what that means?"

Waller looked up from the map upon which he had been tracing with a pencil the course of the proposed cut-off. Drake saw that his eyes were shining with excitement.

"I see it means a cost of millions upon millions even if the route is possible. How do you expect to raise the money?" his cooler partner asked dryly.

Dick brushed aside for the moment the objection. "I'm coming to that. Get this one big

vital point. Build the cut-off and we save a hundred and fifty miles on the run to the coast. As soon as the connection with the Transcontinental is made at Rifle, Winship gets the jump on Sherwin. In other words his Transcontinental trains are put into 'Frisco six hours ahead of those of the North Central Pacific. Instead of being a bad second the Transcontinental steps into a commanding position. What would that be worth to Winship, do you think?"

"Then you're depending on him to build the cut-off for you?"

Waller shook his head. "No. We would be frozen out before he got started. We'll build the road, or at least most of it. Winship will wake up and help us on the last lap, but at first we'll have to carry the thing."

Drake laughed. "How many spare millions have you tucked away in an old stocking, Dick?"

"We'll interest capital to finance it."

"Now you've come to the nub of it. Capital won't be interested." Drake's forefinger sawed the air in prophecy. "With Sherwin's clique

of big financiers against us you can't get a responsible house in New York to undertake the bonds."

"I shan't try." Dick strode up and down the office as he talked. "Look at the facts, Drake. The N. C. P. has always worked against this town and state. We're not on the map for Sherwin except as a way station or a jerkwater feeder. Our rates compared with those given Seattle or 'Frisco are outrageous. For forty years this town has kowtowed to the N. C. P. and begged for crumbs. Let's stop it, right now, once for all."

His friend smiled with the tolerant wisdom of experience. "Good. I would if I were you. To be sure, it's a job hundreds of us have tackled in detail now and again for a good many years. Your uncle took a hand and had to fight for his life to keep from being eaten up. I've brought a few suits myself for various and sundry gentlemen who felt as you do. But I can't claim to have worked any sweeping reform. Still, you have my best wishes."

Waller brought his clenched fist down hard

into the palm of his hand. "Why haven't you won? Because you didn't get together. Because you didn't go to the root of the trouble. Let's get at causes, not effects. Let's hit Sherwin hard where he lives. When the Black Diamond cut-off is built we're on an ocean to ocean route and he can't sidetrack us. We put Denver and Colorado on the map right then. The N. C. P. is eliminated from the control of our destiny. To protect itself it must come to time and treat the state fairly."

"That is true, if we build a cut-off. But you haven't mentioned yet the small detail of how to raise ten million or so."

"By popular subscription."

"But you've just admitted that none of the big banking houses will finance a bond issue for us."

"Then we'll do it ourselves. We'll throw it open to the people of this state and the adjoining ones that are to be benefited by it."

Drake stared. "You don't mean that you are expecting to finance the building of a very

expensive railroad by going into the pockets of Tom, Dick and Harry."

The younger man stopped in his stride and looked down at his partner. The light of a great purpose shone out of his eyes. "You've said it. Tom, Dick and Harry have financed every railroad built in this country. All I propose is to eliminate the middleman and save them all the promoter usually makes out of the deal."

"But——"

"You think I'm a dreamer, Drake. That is what people always think when a man cuts loose from rooted precedent. The men who have made America are the ones who have blazed their own trail. We hold commercial supremacy among the nations because our minds are free and mobile. Our big men aren't afraid to take a chance. It's the distinguishing characteristic of the young fighting West."

"You're forgetting one rather important fact, Dick. The engineers of Winship made surveys for a cut-off from Rifle to Denver some years ago. They reported the road a physical

impossibility. I distinctly remember that they were attempting to come via Black Diamond and the Ptarmigan Pass."

"They tried the wrong route down from the pass."

"How do you know? We can't throw money away on a speculation."

"I know it because Redruth says so in black and white. He made a survey for Uncle Adam and says the project is quite feasible but expensive. His figures admit of no doubt."

"Redruth made a survey for Adam Steel? I never heard of that," exclaimed Drake in surprise.

"Neither did anybody else except the men actually engaged on the work. My uncle played a lone hand."

"Was he expecting to build a line down from Black Diamond?"

"When the steel trust forced him to do it. He foresaw the day when it would gobble up the D. & R. M. to put him out of business, and he intended to be ready for it."

Drake shook his head. "Adam Steel was a

great man. I never saw his equal as a fighter. He held his own against Sherwin's crowd for fifteen years, though they had a hundred times his resources. But I doubt if even Adam Steel could have run this road down from Black Diamond. It would be tremendously expensive and the big financiers would see to it that no brokers would underwrite the deal."

"I don't agree with you. I think Uncle Adam would have won out, and I think we can win out—if we've got the guts, as they say in mining camps."

"You're not up against a theory, Dick, but against cold facts. If Sherwin would let us alone perhaps——"

"He won't. We must make up our minds to that. And I grant you that the cut-off will eat money—money—money. But if we all buck in together we'll win. Wall Street isn't big enough to stop us. More than a hundred million are lying in the banks of this state on deposit. We'll get that money—some of it. On the other hand if we lie down before Sherwin the Consolidated is doomed, the city gets

a bad setback, and forty thousand mouths that now are fed will go empty. Isn't the stake worth fighting for?"

The older lawyer stared out of the window at the business skyline of the city. All he had in the world was invested in Denver and in the Consolidated. Moreover, he loved his city with the passionate sentiment of a contained man without family ties. In the panic of '93 he had lost a fortune in the town. Since then he had won another. Always he had stood in the front rank of the builders of the Queen City.

"It hits us at a bad time, Dick. We're in deep in Consolidated stocks."

"We went in to beat Sherwin. Well, we've got to go in deeper. But you're wrong one way. It's a good time to strike the people. Ten years of bumper crops have made our farmers rich. Business men never were better off. We'll put it squarely up to them. If the citizens of this state won't finance the cut-off they deserve the hard times they surely will get."

"It would be a tremendous job even if the

N. C. P. kept its hands off. People with money are conservative. They want to see dividends. But Sherwin would not let us alone. His agents would be everywhere discrediting the proposition. He would buy up the newspapers. Plenty of our own people would go back on us. In a hundred ways you would find yourself blocked."

Dick knew he had won Drake in spite of the objections he framed. "That's all part of the day's work. We can win if we stand together. My idea would be to go into this just as if it were a political campaign—educate every hamlet in the Rockies to the situation."

Drake shook his head dubiously. He liked Dick, with his unflinching courage and his big open unconquerable heart. In his opinion this young man's force, combined as it was with a persuasive friendliness that made everybody fond of him, would carry his star a long way. But he doubted whether it could take him to success if he set himself the impossible task of beating J. B. Sherwin and the vast interests with which he was allied.

"I was wrong, Dick. You *don't* know what you are up against. We've got to face facts squarely. The coterie of big men you're fighting own this country for all practical purposes. They are the brainiest and the shrewdest financiers in New York, and that means on earth. They dictate government policies. They make cities here and deserts there. Their power is invincible. You might as well undertake to shove Gibraltar into the Mediterranean as to stand up against them when they are in earnest."

"Got to enter a demurrer, Drake. They are not supermen, but of the same stuff as you and I. Concede them brains, and money, and the tremendous power that goes with that, and supreme audacity. Then you have said it all. The people can beat them any time they have the right leaders. Besides, they are not all pulling together. Winship's group is fighting the Sherwin outfit. As soon as we make him sit up and take notice Winship will step in to help us."

Waller's enthusiasm was contagious. Drake

shrugged his shoulders. He was not convinced they would win, but he knew he would stand by Dick in the attempt. He had always known that Richard Waller was going to be a great man. Perhaps now the man and the opportunity had met.

"Better send for Parker and Lander. It won't do any harm to talk things over," the older lawyer conceded.

CHAPTER X

AN INVITATION TO LUNCHEON

WHATEVER advantage there was in a flying start Waller and his friends received. The leading newspapers were publicly pledged with a loud hurrah to the new enterprise before they awoke to the fact that the N. C. P. was bitterly opposed to it. The prominent men of the city were organized into an advisory committee of one hundred, which body was to work with a similar one from the state at large.

Everywhere mass meetings were called and local patriotism drilled to a fighting, compact force. In the West the first article of every man's creed is to "boost" for his town, and this loyalty was stimulated to the utmost. Dick was in the thick of the fight, rallying the sentiment of the state to produce practical results.

It appeared that the first issue of stock offered would be oversubscribed. This was too

good to be true and Waller was not surprised when the first shell of the enemy exploded in his camp.

The *Press,* which under the weight of public opinion had been swung into a half-hearted support of the cut-off, came out with scare headlines in which Dick read the hand of the enemy. In red ink they flared out that Ptarmigan Pass was impassable on account of the steepness of the grade. Moreover, there was no feasible way out of the mountain from the pass. In support of this were given below extracts from the report of the Transcontinental engineers made some years earlier.

The effect was immediate, even though Waller denied this in a strong letter to the *Herald* which covered the ground with facts and figures from a report made to Adam Steel by Redruth, in his day the most eminent railroad engineer in the country.

As Drake had said, the doubt was enough. Capital, with its traditional timidity, hung back and waited for developments. Meanwhile rumors were flying thick and fast that the N. C.

P. would oppose the new road energetically. Sherwin, in an interview telegraphed from New York, ridiculed the undertaking as a piece of palpable folly. Competent engineers had declared that the building of such a line was a physical impossibility. What capital thought of the investment was plain from the fact that no reputable banker was handling the stock, which was being peddled among the farmers like plush albums or lightning rods. He predicted an early collapse to what he termed a bucolic gold brick.

The publication of this interview had the effect of frightening away the timid, but in one unexpected way it strengthened the loins of Waller and his colleagues. Dick at once advertised a public mass meeting in the big auditorium at which the policy of the cut-off promoters was to be outlined. "Our Master—The North Central Pacific" was the caption under which he spoke to a packed audience of twelve thousand people. He was a forceful, magnetic speaker with a voice big enough to fill the great convention hall, and that night he was at his

best. He had still to prove himself a constructionist, but all who heard him felt the tremendous earnestness and enthusiasm, the bulldog driving force, the power of brushing through obstacles, that go so far toward success. He took the city into his confidence and showed how at present the destinies of the state were in the hands of a man frankly hostile to it. The city had come to the parting of the ways. It would be free to go forward to its great future if it had the courage to seize its opportunity. Or it might sink back into a timid sloth which would lead to failure.

For twenty-four hours nothing was talked of in the city but Waller's speech. He had flung down the gauntlet to Sherwin and Wall Street, had announced flatly that Colorado would march forward to her destiny regardless of financial wreckers. Except those whose personal interest aligned them with the trust the young city was with him to a man. Enthusiastic echoes of his speech could be heard in cafés, offices, hotel lobbies, and on the streets.

It was about noon next day that Miss Tessie Steel was driven to the Continental Building in a big tan-colored car.

"We've come to take you to lunch at the Country Club," she announced to Dick as she blew into his office.

"Sorry. Afraid I'm too busy. But it was good of you to think of me."

"Oh, bother! You'll be too busy to live soon," she told him petulantly. "And we were going to have a perfectly *scrumptious* time. Miss Lyndon is with us."

Even this inducement did not shake Waller, but he took time to see her back to her car. The young man at the wheel he recognized as Wellington Marsh. After she had introduced the men Tessie explained how matters stood.

"Says he isn't going with us, but he just is. He can play hookey at the office for a couple of hours and he's just naturally going to do it, too."

Dick opened his smiling lips to say that was quite impossible but found himself saying instead that he would come. His eyes had met

those of the lady in the tonneau and somehow he had changed his mind.

"I'll be back in three minutes," and within the limit he had set himself was seated beside Miss Lyndon in the back seat.

"I heard you last night. You made a great speech." Nora told him after they had left the business section and were running down a boulevard.

"Thank you."

"I hope it will turn the tide. It *has* been setting against us for a day or two, hasn't it?"

Dick liked that "us" she had used. It set his blood to dancing. "Yes. Ever since Sherwin's interview. People with money have been hanging back."

"I have been thinking of a way to help." She had been leaning back among the cushions but now her lissom slender body bent toward him so that the wind might not sweep away her voice. "The shares of the Consolidated stock that Mr. Steel left me are still in my name. Couldn't they be used as collateral to raise a great deal of money?"

"Yes. As the market now stands about a million and a quarter. C. F. & S. has been hammered down again."

"Then I want you to take them and raise money—all you can—and put it into the bonds for the cut-off. It will be a good investment, won't it?"

He looked at her quickly. Her face was all eagerness. There was a flame in the wonderful eyes that would have surprised some men. But it was a part of the kinship of the spirit between these two that he understood.

"No, it wouldn't be a good investment at all. Too great a risk," he told her bluntly.

"Aren't you and all your friends taking that risk? Then why mayn't I?"

"I didn't say you couldn't," he smiled. "But you stand a chance of losing it all. It would depend on whether we win."

"It isn't my money at all . . . And I want to help. I want to use it as Adam Steel would have wanted it used. The new road is the only thing that can save the Consolidated, isn't it?"

"Yes. We can hang on for a year or two with the ore from our other mines, but we shall have to depend ultimately on those around Black Diamond. Under the freight rates just given out we can't possibly survive."

"Then the road must be built. Borrow money on my stock. When can we begin building?"

"We have begun already."

"But I thought it was not determined yet whether you could raise funds enough to justify a start."

"It wasn't. But I dared not wait for that. As soon as I made up my mind the short line had to be built I began shipping supplies over the D. & R. M. to Black Diamond for a construction camp. Under the name of a mining company that operates in that district I shipped great quantities of provisions, scrapers, tents, tools and blasting powder to Black Diamond." She caught again the quizzical smile that illumined his face at times. "I thought we had better plow with Sherwin's heifer as long as we could, so I set the officials of the D. & R. M.

on another false tack. A few days ago there was a three-column story in the *Press* that bristled with misinformation. It was about a big irrigation reservoir projected near Black Diamond. I have had a great quantity of supplies sent up for that project."

"And there isn't to be any reservoir," she guessed, eyes gleaming.

"No; we'll use the supplies on the cutoff."

She clapped her hands softly. Her imagination saw him as a man who had flung open the door of opportunity that led to a great work. "Hurrah! One more point scored in the game. We'll win. I know we shall."

"If we do the line will always be to me the Lyndon Cutoff. You pointed the way. Your money makes it possible. You're the inspiration behind it all."

He spoke quietly, his eyes straight before him. For somehow an odd shyness would not let him look at her. Therefore he did not see the faint rose-flush which tinted the colorless cheeks.

"I wish that were all true," she sighed. "But

it isn't. Still, I do love to help. You'll let me, won't you?"

"Yes. It's a great pleasure for me to have you as a partner."

Their eyes met now. Each of them felt a strong undertug of emotion altogether out of proportion to anything that had been said. Womanlike, she guided the way to shallower waters.

"I don't quite see, though, why you needed to begin at the Black Diamond end of the road at all."

"It's up there on the continental divide that the critical part of the work lies. We have to climb the roof of America at a point where good engineers have said it can't be done. So it's up to us to demonstrate before we can interest Winship of the Transcontinental."

She caught the point alertly. "I see. We might build almost all of the road without help from him if we had not shown that we can reach Ptarmigan Pass with a workable grade."

"That's it exactly. Show him it's feasible and he will be with us at once. But he'll take

a deal of showing because he has made up his mind the proposition is possible."

"But you're going to work from this end, too?"

"Yes, to keep the public interested. The people believe what they see. We'll push across the plain to the hills and many will think when we disappear in them that the work is half done. In point of fact, we shall hardly have begun."

She reverted to another phase of the situation. "Was it a good investment, Mr. Waller, to spend so much of your own money sending supplies to Black Diamond before you knew whether the people were going to back you?" Her mocking eyes were resting with warm approval upon him. "You are such a stickler for good investments without any risk, you know."

He admitted her hit. "*Touché.* But it really wasn't a great risk. I was satisfied the city and state would back me."

"It was really nothing at all," she summed up. "You merely spent every dollar you could raise for the sake of a hazardous public good

that might never develop far enough to pay you back a cent."

Young Marsh swept his machine to a halt in front of the Country Club steps.

"Isn't this heaps better than poking your nose into a law book in your dingy old office?" demanded Tessie, face aglow with the pink whipped into her cheek by the wind.

Dick admitted it was, very much better.

"And don't you *just love* Nora Lyndon?" she wanted to know.

The girl had temporarily appropriated Dick and they were following the others toward the dining-room.

Waller laughed. "I'm supposed to have my adoration focused on another young lady."

She lifted her blond eyebrows and shot a glance aslant at him. "Supposed to have. Dearie me!"

"Who spends most of her time, alas! motoring with handsomer and more attractive men."

Her smiling eyes rested on Wellington Marsh. "He's only a boy," she scoffed. "But he's perfectly dear."

Dick also let his glance wander over the cheerful, well-dressed bulk of their chauffeur. "Please notify me when it's time to get jealous."

"I just don't know whether I will or not," she retorted gaily, with an impudent little tilt to her chin. "An elopement has to be kept secret. Besides, you have no real right to know, because I'm not really engaged to you."

"Aren't you? Since when?"

"Never was. You're just Old Dick. Of course, you're engaged to me, but I'm not to you. If I can't do any better, that's different."

"What if I can do any better?" Old Dick wanted to know, smiling at her whimsical way of putting it.

"You come and see me about it when you think you can. We'll talk it over, and maybe I'll let you off," she nodded at him. Then, raising her voice, she called to Marsh: "Oh, Welly; let's take that *darling* table by the window. And I speak for the corner seat."

Tessie sighed happily, stripped her gloves, and, after she was comfortably settled, de-

flected the conversation to another channel. "Tell us all about your elegant speech, Dick. Was it as Daniel-Websterish as the papers pretend?"

"Oh; the papers didn't tell half. It's agreed that Demosthenes never came within a city block of me," Waller answered gravely.

"Who has agreed, Mr. Conceit?"

"Myself and me," he joked her. "We're boosters for R. Waller.

> 'I've made a study of myself,
> Compared with me the lot,
> And I've finally concluded
> I'm the best friend I've got.'

So I'm boosting my own game."

"It was an all-right speech," Marsh contributed. "Nora and I were there with the governor. She applauded every chance she got. The gov nearly had a fit. Didn't he, sis?"

"I don't think Mr. Marsh did enjoy himself. I was glad Welly sat between us," Miss Lyndon smiled.

"Dad isn't what you would call open-minded when he has taken sides. He thinks you're an anarchist, Mr. Waller."

"Hope you don't share his opinion."

"Me! Oh, I think you're a bully good fighter."

Waiters began to appear as forerunners of the rather elaborate luncheon which Marsh had ordered over the telephone. Whereupon conversation became disjointed and lightly discursive.

CHAPTER XI

SHERWIN MOVES

MORE and more Waller came to think of the new road as a partnership concern of Nora Lyndon and himself. In a larger sense it was, of course, an enterprise belonging to the public. He was the representative of the city and the state in their attempt to free themselves, just as, from another point of view, he was the agent of the Consolidated in its fight against the trust. The people tacitly recognized his leadership. To them the line was The Waller Road, because he was the driving power that was bringing it into being.

But to Dick himself it was the Lyndon Cut-off, though his business associates would have been surprised to know that he cherished such a romantic conception. The young actress had joined hands with him to put the thing through. Her insight had discovered the one chance of

escape for the company and, later, her stock had furnished the money to transform the project from a tentative to an actual one.

Though he did not interfere with his engineers and with the contractors who had undertaken certain sections of the work, Dick himself was in close touch with the firing line. Temporarily he had abandoned his law practice to bear the brunt of the fight. He lived and moved and had his being in expense estimates, grades, bond issues, and a thousand other details that came to him for settlement. In daily consultation with his associates, Waller nevertheless found himself practically a dictator. They might advise, but they left with him the responsibility of final decision.

With Nora alone he dared to voice his doubts and his perplexities. Even to Drake he never let these impinge upon his manner of cheerful confidence. But when alone with the actress he could let down and use her, so to speak, as a safety-valve. She liked to have him bring his troubles to her, and certainly they always seemed lighter to him after they had talked

over his worries. Of her sympathy he could always be sure, and her shrewd common sense surprised him continually.

Her long tour was ended. It had been her intention to spend the summer in a Cornwall village, but at the last minute she had canceled her sailing. The truth was that she could not tear herself away from Colorado while her interest in the Black Diamond cutoff was so vivid. So she stayed at a hotel in Estes Park, where Waller's voice could reach her daily over the long distance telephone. There were moments when she did not feel sure whether it was the railroad or the man back of it that appealed to her the more potently. It is certain that, in the idle dreamy hours, while she basked in the dry sunshine of the Park, her imagination was apt to focus upon him as a subject. He was so strong. She couldn't get away from the power of the man. It was patient, yet audacious. He had the Westerner's large hope and optimism, together with the dynamic energy that moves mountains.

Meanwhile work on the line progressed rap-

idly. At the gates of the city an army with shovels and scrapers was camped. As the weeks passed the shining rails crept steadily toward the mountains. Five miles—ten—twenty—thirty, and, behold, the builders had left the plains and were burrowing into the foothills. So far it had been plain sailing, and the watchers, noting the swift progress made, forgot the mountain wall that rose in front to bar the way. A simple example in proportion proved that if thirty miles could be built in so many weeks two hundred could be constructed in seven times as long a period. The assumption of the local newspapers that supported the enterprise was that now the new road was practically assured of success. Confidence became restored and stock began once more to move freely.

Waller smiled at the premature congratulations of his acquaintances, even while he did not discourage them. His construction camps, working at Ptarmigan Pass, fifteen miles from the Black Diamond end, were still struggling with the first two miles of grade, blasting with

infinite labor along mountain edges and through projecting spurs. The cost was tremendous. All supplies had to be hauled ninety miles by wagon, the D. & R. M. having practically refused to transport them. Yet Dick was satisfied. Every day made it clearer that the approach to Ptarmigan was possible.

Much of the time he was on the ground in person. The difficulties were as familiar to him as they were to Dixon, his chief engineer. It was upon his return from one of these Black Diamond trips that Drake met him at the station, a copy of the Rocky Mountain *Herald* in his hand.

"Seen this, Dick?"

"Not if it is in to-day's paper. What is it?"

"The *Herald's* Washington correspondent says that strong influences are at work to get the Department of the Interior to reserve Trout Lake Cañon for reservoir purposes. The claim is that it is a natural basin needed to store water for the next reclamation project of the government. I wired Jackson, the *Her-*

ald's man, to find out who is back of the lobby. His answer has just come."

"Sherwin and his crowd, of course," Dick took for granted in a quiet voice.

"Yes. Of course, they are working only to keep us from going through the cañon."

Waller stood for a moment, frowning at the yellow slip in his partner's hand. There was, however, a strange exultant gleam in his eyes.

"Can you go to Washington to-night, Drake?"

"Yes."

"You know Bowditch personally. Put him in possession of the facts and get him to reserve his decision until we can prepare a full statement of our case. If he hesitates go direct to the President."

They were already moving toward Drake's car, which was drawn up by the curb outside the depot.

"I'll see both of our senators and have them take the matter up with the President."

"And I'll give you a letter to Senator Baldwin of Ohio. He and my uncle were close

friends. I'll ask him to take you to the President. You'll have your hands full. Sherwin's influence made Bowditch Secretary of the Interior. He'll stand pat against us. The trouble is that a plausible case can be made out for reserving the cañon for irrigation purposes. The administration will very likely decide against us finally. The steel trust came through with a large campaign contribution."

"If the President fails us we're lost. I've been expecting Sherwin to make some new move, but I never thought of such a facer as this."

Dick smiled cheerfully. "I did."

"You knew he'd make a move that put you down and out?" Drake asked incredulously.

"We've got a kick or two left in us yet."

"Oh, of course we can protest. But you say yourself the President probably won't help us. He'll leave it to Bowditch."

"Probably—in the end."

"Then we'll be debarred from running through Trout Lake Cañon, which means that

we can't get down out of the hills. Sherwin will have us corked tight."

"Will he?" Dick's face crinkled to a boyish smile of mischief. As he leaned toward his friend and whispered gaily one might have guessed that he was telling him a pleasant joke.

The effect of that low-voiced sentence upon Drake was startling. He stared at his partner in amazement.

"But—what am I going to Washington for then?"

"Strategic effect! You and I are going to show Sherwin for once that there are people who can not only outgame him but outgeneral him. We're going to make him the laughing stock of the country—if we pull this thing off. Shut Trout Lake Cañon against us, will he? Bottle us in the hills? Not if the luck breaks even. Drake, I wouldn't take a million dollars to get out of this fight."

"You've known this all along, have you?"

"Yes."

"And never mentioned it to a soul?"

For a fraction of a second Dick hesitated.

One young woman had known it for several weeks. "I haven't hinted it even to Dixon. You're the first man that has heard it. I've been afraid even to dream about it for fear I might talk in my sleep."

Drake's hand closed on his with a crushing grip. "Boy, I envy you. You're a wonder. If you pull it off it will be the biggest coup ever made in this state."

"If *we* pull it off," Waller corrected. "You're in this as much as I am. You'll put up a bully fight at Washington. The whole country is going to talk about the row for the cañon. You'll kick up a lot of dust, and that's what we need—dust enough so that Sherwin can't see what's going on out here. Drake, if we win—well, I'll see to it that the state kills the fatted calf for you. Sounds good, doesn't it—Senator Drake? And, what's more, you'll honor the place the people give you."

The older man flushed. It had been the ambition of his life to go to the United States Senate. But his sense of honor had hitherto

made it impossible to snatch the victory from less scrupulous men.

"You're going a little fast, aren't you?" he laughed. "We'll let the senatorial toga wait. I'll do my best for the cause regardless of that. If I can I'll make noise enough at Washington to draw the enemy's attention while you outflank him in Colorado."

They talked the situation over at length behind locked doors, discussing it from every angle. That secrecy was of the utmost importance was impressed upon both of them. If an inkling of their plans reached Sturgis Marsh or Sherwin they were lost. It was, however, characteristic of both of them that neither asked for silence from the other. Reticence and loyalty were of the essence of their characters.

To the newspapers Waller was vocal with indignation at the dastardly attempt of these financial wreckers to block the short line by getting the government to withdraw Trout Lake Cañon for reclamation purposes. He confidently predicted that the administration

would never lend itself to such a nefarious project.

The lawyer found that his interviews had lent to the situation just the tinge of feverish anxiety he had anticipated. The Chamber of Commerce, the commercial clubs, various civic bodies, as well as private individuals by scores wired messages of protest to Washington against the proposed action of the Secretary of the Interior. Even Dick's closest friends believed that if the department decided against them the cut-off was lost. He read depression in the manner of the business men he met at the club, and open jubilation in the editorial columns of the *Press*. That paper confidently announced that Waller's bluff had been called. His gold brick flim-flam had now been fully exposed. Knowing that success was impossible, he had taken the money of the people to forward his own interests. Fortunately the government was about to knock the last prop from under the absurd swindle before any more of the citizens had lost their savings. The only pity was that several thousand resi-

dents of the state had already been induced to contribute largely to the scheme through the misrepresentations of the coterie of capitalists who were pushing the fraud.

CHAPTER XII

TESSIE GOES TO A NEW ADVENTURE

AFTER three weeks of hard living in the hills with his engineers and in construction camps Waller reached Denver on a Friday night. His secretary and a stenographer, notified by telephone of his coming, were waiting at the office of the president of the Consolidated. There was work enough piled up on his desk to have kept some men busy for a week, but Dick knew both how to concentrate and how to get the most out of others. By the time the morning whistles of the mills were blowing his desk was clean.

Breakfast finished, he returned to the office and was busy every minute until noon with the lawyers, merchants, newspaper reporters, and others who had been given appointments to meet him.

At 12:30 he boarded a train bound for Love-

land, at which point he would take the stage for Estes Park. Dick felt that he had earned a week-end of rest. He was going to see his partner in the Black Diamond short line and he looked forward to the two days in her company with keen pleasure. It occurred to him incidentally that he would also meet the girl to whom he was provisionally engaged, but this did not flutter his pulses in the least.

Waller heard his name called as he swung down from the car steps.

"Oh, you Dick!"

Tessie Steel was standing in a motor car waving a flag at him excitedly.

As he strode toward her with his suitcase, the lawyer saw that Wellington Marsh was at the wheel and Miss Lyndon and Selma Glendinning were in the tonneau.

Tessie's eager little hand reached far out of the car to greet him. "It's just perfectly an age since I've seen you, Dick. Why, it was in the paleontolic period, whenever that was. And it's adding insult to injury for you to look so happy about it," she bubbled.

"I'm cheerful because at last I do see you," her cousin smiled.

She burlesqued a sigh gaily. "If I could just believe that I shouldn't be so *dreadfully* distressed."

Dick shook hands all around before he took up her last remark.

"Is it as bad as that?" he asked lightly, his glance coming back to her from the radiant young man at her side.

"Isn't it, Selma? You know my good times are all a hypocrisy. I'm a *devastated* wreck," she assured Dick gleefully. "I only keep up on stimulants. Selma is one and Welly is another."

"And Miss Lyndon?" her amused fiancé wanted to know.

"Oh, *she's* a sedative. If it weren't for her —but jump in. It's all arranged. We're going to a hotel for lunch and then we'll run up to the park."

"But I don't want to foist myself on Mr. Marsh," Dick protested. "I can go up on the stage."

"We came down to get you," Marsh explained. "This is Tessie's little picnic. We all do as she says."

"So you're chained to her chariot wheel, too, are you?" Dick commented, stowing away his suitcase and taking a seat beside Miss Lyndon.

Wellington nodded. "Of course. She always has her own way."

"What nonsense! It's me that is chained to *your* chariot wheel. I can't help it. I do so love to *go*. A motor is my idea of heaven."

"You may have this one."

"For keeps?" she asked promptly.

"Yes, if you'll take me to run it," Marsh grinned.

"For keeps?" Selma cried.

"Of course."

Tessie tip-tilted her chin toward him. "Is this a *really truly* proposal?" she demanded suspiciously.

"You've got him, Tessie. Let me take your breach of promise case if he backslides," Dick urged.

"Oh, I'm standing pat," Welly assured them.

"You're a nice boy. Now if you were grown up I might think of it."

"I'm improving that way every day."

"Oh, you kid!"

"Retain that attitude of mind toward him and the rest of the men will be grateful," Nora laughed.

At lunch Tessie turned to conversational pastures new. It was her habit to skip lightly from one theme to another without relevance.

"You positively look younger every time I see you, Dick. What's your secret?"

"Coming into my second youth. We all have our Indian summer, you know."

"And I was expecting to see you all frazzled out. You're not half so *extinguished* as you ought to be. Don't you know you're down and out? The *Press* says so. What business have you looking so chipper?"

"I'm trying to keep up my courage by whistling."

She gave a sage, impudent little nod. "Well, you needn't deceive yourself. Welly is going

to *put the kibosh* on your little railroad. So there, Mr. Empire Builder."

"Oh, I say," remonstrated Marsh.

"Dear me! I forgot it was a secret. Never mind. Dick won't tell anyone."

Waller looked at the younger man with a smile behind which lay keen watchfulness. "So you're going to take a fall out of me, Mr. Marsh?"

Welly's grin covered embarrassment. "Nothing personal, you know."

"Just in the way of business. Have I got to go down heavily?"

The young fellow looked at him with steady eyes. "Won't be my fault if you don't, Mr. Waller."

"Then I'll be looking for a soft spot."

"You're a good sport. And you've got a kick in either mitt. Wish we could both win."

"We can't. I'll try anyhow to oblige you with that good scrap your soul is longing for," laughed the lawyer.

"Selma and Miss Lyndon and I will weep

over the defunct. The funeral will be such chastened fun," Tessie suggested.

Dick laughed, without the least resentment. He perceived that Miss Tessie had gone over to the enemy. Her warning gave him however matter for reflection. Something new was on the boards, some move to be made that would clinch his defeat. The morning paper had told him that Sturgis Marsh had gone to Washington to see the President about the Trout Lake basin reservoir project and had left his son to take charge of the local end of the fight. Dick would have given a good deal to know what Wellington's orders were.

Marsh drove the car through the warm sunshine toward the gash that cut like a sword cleft into the hills to let the waters of the Big Thompson into the Platte valley. Once within the cañon gateway, the rock walls lifted sheer so that much of the way they traveled in the shade. It was a lovely drive through one of the most beautiful earth rifts in the Rockies. Beside them tumbled the waters of the river, sometimes in a narrow torrent that fought its

growling way down over and around great boulders and again in a stretch of swift white-capped rapids. The view changed every minute as they swept around curve after curve, but everywhere it was grand.

Seated beside Nora Lyndon in the tonneau, Dick yielded to a sense of great content both physical and mental. Wars and rumors of wars were for the hour banished from his mind. It was amazing how she rested him, even though his mind was never more active. The satisfying quality in her did not depend upon mere youthful good looks, though he would have been a harsh critic who would have found fault with the lines of that compact supple body or the fine gallant poise of the little head crowned with a glory of golden cornsilk hair. Her distinction was born of the vital spirit in her, flashed from eyes of a starry honesty. She was alive and impassioned in every Celtic fiber of her, though this accorded with a self-containment and a reticence that knew how to hold her defences without intrusion. For she had the rare gift of a friendliness

that repelled familiarity and a fine dignity that could forget itself without letting others forget it.

For twenty-five miles they ascended steadily by a road smooth as a billiard ball and sinuous as the river along which it ran. A swift dip down brought them into Estes Park, which lay in a drowse of tempered golden sunlight. Before them debouched thousands of acres of gently rolling meadow bounded by upland studded with beautiful open groves of pine, spruce and quaking aspen. Tents of campers, stirred by the breeze, flapped friendly greeting. Fishermen, knee deep in the waters of the river, whipped the riffles where two-pounders lurked. Motor cars full of gay picnickers hummed past. To Waller it seemed that the care of the world had been sloughed at the gateway to this wonderful Eden-garden.

They ate dinner at the hotel, and afterward walked home with Miss Glendinning to her people's summer cottage. Tessie, as usual the *dea ex machina* of the party, contrived to pair

herself with Waller on the way back and to let Welly and Miss Lyndon get in the lead.

"Take the short cut over Sheep Hill," she called to them. "I want to show Dick the remains of a *splendiferous* sunset." To her partner she explained: "You'll see a scrumptious blaze of color in the saddle of the mountains."

"Not unless we move faster than we are doing now," Dick demurred.

Tessie, who was setting the pace, was deliberately loitering behind the others. She turned now a challenging face toward him.

"Are you afraid of the dark? You didn't use to be in such a hurry to get me back to the others."

"Did I say I was in a hurry?"

"You don't have to *say* it. Can't I tell?"

The darkness was descending on them from the hills. Practically they were alone for the first time in weeks. She was standing very close to him, her pretty piquant face, tantalizingly red-lipped, upturned to his. He under-

stood that the beguiling little empress of hearts expected him to play the lover.

He kissed her.

Her laughter mocked him. "You're an ardent lover, Dick. If you don't ginger up Nora Lyndon never in the world will take you."

Her audacity struck him dumb for the moment. The blood beat to his face in waves.

"Never in the world," she added, with an imperious little nod.

"What nonsense are you saying?"

"That's *all right* for you, sir. Think I'm blind?"

"I think you have a vivid imagination."

She turned her charming chin-tilted face away. Pin-points of mischief were gleaming in her eyes. She began to dab at them with her handkerchief. "She has cut me out. My c-r-r-u-e-l lover is going to throw me over."

"Absurd."

Her slim body shook with emotion. "Oh, you can *say* absurd of course. But you *perfectly know* it's true. You're wondering how

you can decently jilt me after having won—my—young—affections," she sobbed.

Waller was not quite sure whether she momentarily meant it or not. He played for time.

"Didn't know I had won your young affections, my dear."

"You're trying to give me a chance to save my p-pride."

From behind her wadded handkerchief a corner of a dancing eye peeped at him. His doubts were resolved.

"I'm not worried about your pride, and as for jilting—well, that's a subject which must be embarrassing to Miss Tessie Steel."

"I do believe he's going to add insult to injury," she confided in plaintive confidence to a star just visible above Long's mighty peak.

"No, I'm going to leave you to your conscience—if you have any. For of course this is the Tessie Steel way of announcing her engagement to a younger and handsomer man."

"Dick!" she exploded, her face bubbling with excited protest.

"Oh, Tessie—Tessie," he pretended to reproach.

"As if I would—without telling you first," she weakened.

"You're telling me now, aren't you?"

Tessie seated herself on a big rock and poked at the moss with the point of her alpenstock.

"You know you don't . . . *care* for me," she evaded.

"The business before the house at present is to determine whether you care for me."

"I don't see why it is. You're every bit as bad as I am," she retorted with spirit.

"Which, as to yourself, is a confession."

"It isn't either." She broke into sudden dimpling smiles. "You old goose!"

"This is very honest of you—to want to be off with the old love before you are on with the new."

She bit her lip to keep the laughter back. "Dick! How dare you?"

He sat down beside her on the boulder, friendly malice in his eyes. "Let's understand

the circumstances fully. Has he proposed yet?"

She countered with a sidelong flash of her eyes. "Have you?"

"That's a Yankee answer, and ruled by the court irrelevant, incompetent and immaterial."

"You tell me and I'll tell you. That's fair, Dick."

"But if I have nothing to tell?"

"We'll each write it," she decided briskly, the corners of her mouth moving to the creation of fresh dimples. "Give me a pencil and paper. A sheet from that note book will do." She dived into a pocket of his waist coat. I'll write over here and you over there. Then we'll change papers."

He could not help laughing at her. "You're such a hurricane of energy when you get started. What is it I'm to write?"

"Just the one word, yes or no."

He understood that she was taking this means to tell him something without putting it into words. Scribbling a word, he waited for her to turn around. She did at length, blush-

ing furiously. He held out his hands, one to give and one to receive. Reluctantly hers came forward.

"How are we going to see?"

Dick flashed the little electric battery he carried for use on his car at night. She read "No," and he "Yes."

She began to explain hurriedly. "Of course I told him that——"

"I know what you told him, near enough. It's what you wanted to tell him and didn't that is important."

This stopped effectually her torrent of protestation. "Oh, Dick," was all she could find to say, and this in a stifled little voice.

"'Fess up, Tess."

The point of her stick prodded at the moss. "Well, you know, Dick, I never *did* tell you I would. Now did I?"

"No, you didn't."

"And you don't *really* care. You thought you did at first, but you know better now." Her gaze came up and met his steadily.

He made no denial of the charge.

"I like you tremendously, Dick, but——"

"I understand," he nodded.

"And so it's best, isn't it, to shake hands and just be friends?"

"Yes. I think it is."

Her audacity could not quite let it go at that. As she rose and brushed a dead leaf from her skirt laughter spilled over her saucy face. "And wish each other luck on the next adventure, which is calling to us already."

Welly Marsh and Miss Lyndon were standing out in silhouette on a rock rim at the summit. The voice of the young man came faintly down to them.

Waller chuckled. "It's calling you anyhow. Let's go up to meet it. *Le roi est mort. Vive le roi.*"

Tessie drove her alpenstock into the turf and began to climb. "That's all very well, Cousin Dick, but what about queens?" she flung back over her shoulder.

Presently a turn in the path cut them off from the sight of those above. Tessie waited

for Waller and turned her bewitching smile upon him.

"Dick, you don't hate me, do you?"

He waved a warning finger at her. "Stop right there, you little flirt, unless you want me to forget that you've just jilted me."

"Maybe I wouldn't care—if you did forget it—just this once—to show there's no hard feeling."

He caught her by the shoulders and shook her, laughing the while.

"Do you always break your engagements with kisses?" he demanded.

"Why Dick, you're my cousin, but of course if you don't want to—."

He took his cousinly privilege.

CHAPTER XIII

A FREE WOMAN

THEY had been gathering flowers and now were walking across the hillside to the place where Waller had tied their horses. In the hard light of day the beauty of many actresses is erased. To the faces of others exercise gives a blotchy color. But Nora Lyndon stood both tests amazingly.

The sunlight, shaking down upon her through the branches of the pines, kissed a delicately flushed face and haloed a golden head exquisitely poised. It checkered her simple white dress, the skirt of which rippled at every step into changing lines, now falling free, now modeling itself to the outline of the knees and slender thighs. It came again to Richard that the outstanding note of her young loveliness was its glad freedom. She pulsed so with feeling, was so eager to drink deeply of life, and yet withal was of the finest

purity. One gained the sure impression that she was gallantly mistress of her fate.

Far below them a dusty white ribbon wound through the valley lazily. Along this crept a motor car with two passengers. One of them waved a flag. Three short toots of the horn drifted up to them. Waller swung his hat by way of greeting. The machine did not stop, but crawled forward in a fine haze of dust until the road disappeared behind a hill.

"They're both tremendously busy having a good time these days," Miss Lyndon said with a faint wistful smile.

"Yes. They are in process of falling in love with each other. Doesn't that always imply a happy time?"

"Not always, but I think it does this time. I hope so. I like them both very much."

"So do I."

For several moments neither spoke. She glanced toward him. He had, she judged, thrown down the bars for frank comment.

"I had a long talk with Tessie last night. She came to my rooms in her dressing gown."

Though she had not emphasized the words, Richard guessed a special import behind them. A smile twitched at his lips.

"She had a secret to tell you," he hazarded.

"Yes."

"I can guess it."

She nodded. "I just wanted to tell you that I am glad."

The blood burned in his face. An ecstacy of hope throbbed through his veins. He dared not look at her lest his thought might be wrong and he be punished for his presumption.

"Why are you glad?" he asked, his voice unintentionally gruff.

"Because I like her—and you."

He was disappointed. "And so you are glad we're not going to be married."

"Yes. I am. You don't love each other . . that way. And marriage without love is fatally wrong."

The voice, always one to stir men with its haunting loveliness, told more than words of the deep hurt life had brought to her brave soul. All her fineness, all the richness of her

nature, had not availed to save her from shipwreck. His heart warmed to her for the heavy seas that had swamped the craft of the young wife.

He drew a deep breath. "Yes. I know that . . . . now."

"Nothing will take the place of love." The color in her cheeks deepened to a rose tint. "I've wanted to tell you—about my engagement to your uncle. I did wrong. It was treason to love. I know that now."

Her truthful look dropped straight as a plummet into his eyes. He waited, absorbed in her low-voiced confession. Nor had he any impulse to belittle it with a conventional denial.

"Perhaps I knew it then. But when I first met him I had been mauled frightfully . . . . through love. The life had been crushed out of me and I was oh! so weary. I wanted to bury myself in my work, but people would not let me alone. Perhaps you don't know how a public character is pursued—especially actresses."

"You mean—by lovers?"

"Yes, though most of them are a desecration to the name. I was sick of them all—and I met Adam Steel. He brushed through the little things to the big ones. In his great strength I found rest, safety, a port of refuge. I didn't want to spend myself in giving love. I wanted to be surrounded by it like a little child without taking a chance of loss by giving my own. That wasn't fair. But you can't think how glad I was for a chance to lean on a strong man, and at the same time to help him do his work. So I promised to marry him."

"But later—when you found love had been left out of your count—you broke with him."

She hesitated. "That wasn't the immediate reason, but it was the one back of my decision. I couldn't go on. I tried—and I couldn't."

He drew a deep breath and plunged.

"You think marriage is never justified without love——I mean a great love, the certainty that it is the one love of a lifetime?"

"We're not all capable of the great love, are

we? But surely it is a sin to be content without the best that is in us."

"Most of us miss that. Either we never find it or we find it too late."

"And without it life is colorless, a thing dead and formal. Society is all for convention, for regularity. It puts its ban on love unless it happens to be stamped with the trade mark of its approval. The spirit is nothing. The letter is all. Lies and evasions and hypocrisies—marriage is swamped with them."

"Yes," he admitted. "The restless and the selfish find their freedom through the divorce court, the timid and the less selfish yield to their environment and are held by their bonds."

Her eyes were on the far away hills, which stood out brilliant as sapphires in that crystal clear atmosphere.

"The poets are right. Love is a great tragic joyous force. Through it comes freedom, not bondage. In its atmosphere are born the fine impulses that go out to bless the world. A true marriage is the union of two souls. It releases all the better forces of their natures to

such joy as they have only dreamed before. The delights of the senses are shared and transmuted to spiritual power. Your true lovers are kings and queens. They inherit the earth and the heavens above them. Together they come into that unity which understands unspoken thoughts and opens up new visions of service and happiness."

She had apparently forgotten him and was voicing softly the conviction of her heart. Her eyes were wonderful. Quickened life suffused delicately her cheeks. The poet in her was awake and eager.

"I know now why Nora Lyndon makes the best lover on the American stage," he told her.

She turned to him, a faint smile of apologetic embarrassment on her face. "I'm afraid I'm incurably sentimental, but—well, I don't believe in the sort of marriages upon which society sets its approval. They are a crime against love. Marriage ought not to be slavery. It ought not to put chains on a man or on a woman. It should bring them into a larger freedom. But it doesn't—not usually. It

means loss of liberty, a narrowing of the horizon. Each party to it wants to bind the other as much as possible. Love dies, and the real marriage is dissolved; but the forms of it still shackle the victims. They do the *respectable* thing—keep up the smiling lie to the world and sometimes to each other. So hypocrisy and shame are bred, and free men and women sink into slavery."

He understood that she spoke out of her experience, that her heart had been under the harrow of a marriage from which love had vanished and left only sorrow and shame. And he divined too that though she had passed through the things that pollute they had not soiled her clean soul. She had come out of the mire a pure woman—and a free one. She did not raise her voice. She did not declaim. But her words rang like a bell. They were a declaration of independence against the shams of an institution upon which society has set its smug blessing.

"I concede all you say," he smiled. "But I don't quite see how you are going to work out

a reform—unless you do away with the stigma that attaches to divorce."

"That's just what we shall do when we have the courage to face the facts. Divorce will be universal—free to all that want it. A man and a woman make a mistake. Through their marriage life is not enhanced. Why should the law declare that union irrevocable which is in fact no true union? And why should release from unhappiness be refused unless one or the other drags before the public all their common failings? The race develops to higher forms through the joy of its individuals. But we live in such a social muddle that most people are barred from happiness by their environment."

"Oh, I grant you our social incoherence. Half of our accepted beliefs won't bear inspection. We're all mixed on values—don't realize what is important and what isn't. So we make a hard and fast law and order human nature to adjust itself to it. A whole network of pretences bolsters up marriage. Some day we may work into a better state, but in the

meantime we must have laws for the sake of social order."

"Yes, but if we don't reach for the better things we'll never have them. And those who know the truth ought to live up to it." With the swift change of mood that was one of her charms laughter rippled over the face as sunshine across a lake in summer. "So now the sermon is ended, sir. And I hope you like it."

"Did you preach it to me or to yourself."

"To both of us."

"I say thanks for my share of it, O Priestess of Love."

Her merry laugh rang on the wind, but a glance of keenest question, swift as the flash of an electric button, swept sidelong to his face.

"Of freedom, say. But of all things love should be most free. And to that end it must be strong. Women are trained to feebleness of purpose by the conventions that encompass them. We are getting away from those to an enlargement of our personalities."

"In this state you are politically free at least."

"I suppose that helps." The fun bubbled in her eyes again. "But I don't think it a supreme achievement to make a woman as like a man as possible, and that seems to be the aim of the leaders of the suffrage movement."

His heart cried "Amen!" to that as he watched the light grace of her motions. Of a slim suppleness, yet strong and buoyant, pulsating, vibrant, feminine to the fingertips, she moved in a world wonderful, one luminous with poetry and that light which never was on land or sea. She did all things with a high spirit, with a fine direct courage which faced frankly the essential facts of life. Yet she was woman to the core. Her appeal to the public was based largely upon the charm of sex. And Richard Waller was finding it more and more difficult to escape her attraction. With her in mind it was impossible for him to welcome any movement for the effacing of fundamental differences between man and woman.

"But the political emancipators have been moving in the right direction," she conceded. "Some of them just now don't quite see the

way. I think Ellen Key has the right of it when she says that they want to be emancipated from their sex instead of from their limitations. Their protest is against God and not against man. What woman should reach for is richer life in her own sphere rather than to push into man's." Nora looked at him with serene eyes in which was no shame. "Let her claim her place in the world as a woman, as the mother of the race. Let her demand, for the sake of all future generations of men and women, the respect for her life-bearing powers that will come of freedom and the knowledge of how to use it."

He helped her mount and swung to the saddle himself. Together they rode through the splendid sunlit park. She was all gayety again. The exhilaration of swift travel whipped the blood into her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled. She looked at her companion and laughed aloud with the sheer joy of living.

"Isn't it glorious?"

He nodded. He could not trust speech, lest he say too much. For his whole being was

flooded with her radiance. What a woman! How glorious she would be as a lover! Impossible ever to exhaust the charm, the mystery, the enticement of her. Love was the key to unlock her rich personality. By means of it one might pass through the outer rooms of her being to the inner holy of holies. And if her lover should prove worthy he would find incomparable delight in the blended joys of the senses and the spirit that would come of union with her.

She had opened to him for a moment the door into her heart. For what purpose? His imagination trod softly, for every instinct in him reverenced the thing she had done. Unless he erred from presumption, she had given him that glimpse of herself that he might find the way to win her if he had it in him. He thanked Heaven for it, as another proof of her fine courage and of her trust in him. Theoretically society glorifies Motherhood, but any woman who pursues it with energy is despised. It is her supreme duty, but she must seem to shrink from her divine mission. She must go

to her destiny in haphazard blindfold fashion to satisfy the convention of a foolish mock modesty. But Nora Lyndon would have none of this. She had looked at him with eyes unafraid.

As they cantered along the sunny road Richard Waller prayed humbly to such gods as he worshipped that he might be the man to awaken her soul and set free all the finer impulses of her nature.

CHAPTER XIV

WELLY BUILDS AT A POWER PLANT

THE Trout Lake Cañon imbroglio was developing at Washington along the lines Waller had expected. Secretary Bowditch had made it plain to Drake that the Interior Department would reserve the cañon for water storage purposes and no pressure on the part of the Colorado congressional representatives had been able to move him. An appeal had been taken to the President, who had asked the Secretary of the Interior to withhold his order of withdrawal from public entry of the reservoir site until a fuller investigation could be made.

Agents of the government had gone over the ground carefully and it was expected that their report would be made public within two weeks. Meanwhile Dick had received a private tip that the finding would be against him and his friends.

Business in connection with the short line detained Waller in Denver several days. Near the close of the week a wire from Dixon called him immediately to Black Diamond.

The engineer, an energetic nervous little man with black eyes as shiny as jet beads, was waiting for Richard on the platform of the Black Diamond station. He drew the lawyer to one side.

"The devil's to pay. Day before yesterday young Marsh unloaded two hundred men and a large quantity of supplies at Red Rock. They pushed across country and headed for Trout Lake Cañon."

Waller's eyes gleamed. "How do you know?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure of it just the same. One of my boys happened to be down at Red Rock when the outfit arrived. He hung around until they had got started, then struck out on the jump to tell me. I hit their trail yesterday and had a talk with two of their teamsters. They've been hired for a month. The story is that they are going to put up a

power plant somewhere, but that didn't fool me one little bit. They mean to hold the cañon against us so as to have prior possession in case the government decides against the reservoir project. They have rifles and ammunition with them."

"Sure of that?" Dick asked sharply.

"That's the talk around Red Rock. Several people saw the guns. Marsh said they were to shoot game. Of course that's a bluff. They're going to keep us from going through Trout Lake Cañon. I'd bet my head on it."

"Let's get out of town. The agent is watching us," Waller said suddenly.

It was not till they were on the outskirts of the mining camp and the team had slowed down to take Son-of-a-Gun Hill that Dick spoke again.

"Marsh has no right to preëmpt the cañon. The law won't back him in such a thing. I'll go to the courts and have him ousted."

"Oh, the courts! He'll drag proceedings out for years and meanwhile he'll sit tight. He's

depending on his guns and not the law. He's got possession. That's the main point."

There was a faint smile on the face of the lawyer. A shrewd observer might have read exhilaration behind it. Perhaps he was scenting the battle from afar.

"Anyhow, I'll ride over and see how Marsh talks. I can show him that this is an outrage."

Dixon exploded. "Great Heavens, he knows that already. You can't fight a trust with the Golden Rule when it's on the war-path. He'll stand pat. I've seen that trick played before. I was with a Transcontinental outfit putting a road through Rogers Pass ten years ago and an armed squad blocked the exit. They were employed by the P. D. & R. We came near having a pitched battle before the big fellows at the head of the companies got together at New York and fixed up a compromise."

"Don't you think we might bluff Marsh?" There was in the lawyer's manner not the faintest hint of the amusement he felt.

"Not a chance in the world." Dixon's free

hand went out in a nervous gesture. "He's got us tied up, and he knows it. We can't attack him without prejudicing our case with the government. If we tried violence we would play into Sherwin's hands. He would have Bowditch throw us out of court."

"Then we'll have to try finesse. Send some of your surveyors down there to see what can be done by following a route along the rim of the cañon above."

The engineer shook his head vehemently. "Absolutely no use. I've always had my doubts about a line through the gorge, but you say Redruth made surveys that demonstrated its feasibility. But when you talk about running above the cañon—well, that's a sheer impossibility."

"You don't quite get the point, Mark. I want young Marsh to think we are trying to run the high line because we are driven to it by desperation. So fire your surveyors down there. Keep them fooling around taking elevations and setting stakes. Better go with them yourself till the thing gets started. And

be sure none of them even guess they're not there for business."

The black eyes of the railroad builder had been fixed full on Waller. Now, with a lift of his shoulders, he disclaimed responsibility. "You've got some idea in the back of your head that you haven't told me. That's all right. Perhaps you know what you're driving at. I don't," he concluded irritably.

"I think I do." Waller laid an arm across the other man's shoulder and the touch of it was almost a caress. "Mark, you'll have to trust me for a few days. I'm under a pledge not to tell even you just yet. I understand of course you're quite safe, but it isn't my secret. You'll be the first person told."

Dixon's face cleared. "That's all right. All I mean is that as your engineer in charge I'm entitled to your confidence. If I haven't it I'll resign and you can appoint a man who has."

"You have it, Mark. I'll go so far as to say that I'll clear this point up before next Saturday."

"And I wish you would bring up with you

Redruth's plan for the approach to Trout Lake Cañon. I want to get familiar with the route."

A flash of fun sparkled in Richard's eyes. "All right, I'll bring his surveys with me."

"Things are looking good at Ptarmigan. I'm convinced the approach to the pass is possible. Give me another six weeks and I'll be able to demonstrate it to anybody."

"Fine! That eliminates one of our problems. I like the way you worked out the Ptarmigan proposition, Mark. I was in luck to get you."

Waller spent the day at his construction camps looking over the work with Dixon and early next morning rode over to Trout Lake Cañon. As he descended the gorge he observed that the stone foundations of buildings were going up on both sides of the stream. These were large enough to block the whole space between the river bed and the rock walls.

Waller chuckled to himself. The elaborate preparations of the enemy were of a nature to convince him that no other route had been thought of as possible.

"No railroad goes through here if Welly knows it. I've got to be very much put out," Dick told himself as he followed the winding road.

Young Marsh, supervising the work in his shirtsleeves, might have served as a model to Praxiteles for his Hermes. His flannel shirt was open at the throat, displaying a superbly modeled neck and throat.

"Hello, Mr. Waller," he shouted. "Glad to see you. Want a job at thirty per? I can use another hand."

"What do you think you are doing here?" Dick asked gravely.

Welly straightened up from the rock he had been rolling and surveyed smilingly the activities about him. Teams were leveling the ground with scrapers. Others were hauling granite on sleds to an improvised yard where masons were chipping the boulders to the right shape. Laborers were digging and shoveling. Everywhere were activity and energy.

"We're building a power plant."

"What for?"

"For the Central Colorado Power & Light company, just incorporated under the state laws."

"The thing's absurd. There's no power here to speak of."

The young athlete glanced at the thin stream trickling down the empty river bed. His eyes twinkled merrily. "I'm sinking a good deal of money on the supposition that there is. You oughtn't to discourage laudable enterprise."

"You're sinking the money to block this cañon for our road. The law won't uphold you in it. Your buildings will be palpable obstructions."

"I expect our power plant has about as much right here as your railroad," Marsh answered with perfect good nature.

"Your power plant is a fraud. You simply want to hold the right of way in case the government doesn't withdraw the place as a reservoir site."

"I won't contradict you, Mr. Waller. Whatever the reason is, we're building the plant."

"I shall apply for an injunction to prevent you from building."

"That's your right. I certainly would." The young man put his hands in his pockets and laughed genially at Waller's irritation. "Meantime, what's the matter with you getting down and having lunch with us. This is a business difference between us and not a personal one."

Richard's face cleared. "You're on."

He liked this young fellow's frank spirit, and he saw no reason why their fight should not remain a friendly one so far as they were concerned.

Welly showed him about while they were waiting for luncheon and explained the details of the work upon which he was engaged. Back of it all there was a laugh that suggested to his guest that the work was all a pretence. For the time both of them ignored the war that was on, at least upon the surface of their talk, which presently drifted to a certain young woman very much in Welly's mind.

"I say, Tessie Steel is coming up here, she

and Miss Glendinning. They're trying to land a chaperone to bring them up for a week. I'm having a special tent and outfit brought up for them. Run over and see us, won't you?"

"Let me know when they come. I will if I'm not too busy," Waller promised but without much intention of wasting his time on women just now.

They parted on perfectly friendly terms, Waller to return to his camp and thence to Denver, Marsh to push the construction of the power plant which was to block the exit of the cutoff from the mountains among which it was winding its devious way.

CHAPTER XV

A BIT OF STRATEGY

THE application of Waller for an injunction having been denied, Welly sent him an ironical telegram of sympathy, at the same time renewing his invitation for the lawyer to come up and see the progress of the power plant. He added as an inducement an ambiguous sentence that was clear enough to Richard. "They are coming Monday."

The same day that the injunction was denied Dick received from Drake a long telegram in cipher. It told him that he had sure information that the Secretary of the Interior had decided the Trout Lake case against them finally and would make a public announcement within the week. The President had absolutely declined to interfere further in the matter.

The time for his great coup had come. Waller did not lose an hour. For weeks he had been quietly shipping supplies over the short

line to its present terminus at the construction camps in the foothills near Denver. Scores of additional wagons had joined the little army of graders, the teams of which were busy with plows and scrapers pending further orders. Now Richard gave his purchasing agents orders to buy twenty-five saddle and pack horses. These were to be sent forward to the camps among the foothills.

From a firm with which he had done much business and in which he had confidence Richard bought twenty rifles of the latest make. These were boxed, labeled shovels, and shipped to the firing line along with plenty of ammunition.

Waller wired to Dixon that he was coming and boarded the first train for Black Diamond. As usual the chief engineer met him with a rig.

"How's everything?" the lawyer asked.

"Couldn't be better at Ptarmigan. We've graded almost to the summit now. The gangs are all making progress. But we're short of supplies again. I have a list of things at the camp we need."

"Got around Red Top all right, did you?"

"Yes. I decided not to tunnel. We swing around the edge and hit the saddle at the lowest point possible. I'm proud of that job."

Waller told abruptly what was in his mind. "I want you to cut down your force at Ptarmigan about one half, Mark."

Dixon's sharp beady eyes fastened on his chief. "I wouldn't do that unless you're cramped financially. Make your cut in expenses after we've proved definitely that the project is possible."

"We're not laying off men. Money is still coming in, or at least it has been until Welly Marsh seized the cañon. No, within a month I expect to more than double the number of men we have at work now."

"Then—I don't get you. We're working right now on the most important point of the road—unless it is the Trout Lake section."

"I'm not interested in Trout Lake."

"Why aren't you?" demanded the other sharply.

"Because our line isn't going to run through Trout Lake Cañon."

"Then how do we get down from the hills?" It occurred to Dixon for a moment that his worries had unsettled the good judgment of his leader. "I don't care what Redruth says; there's no way to reach the Muddy except through Trout Lake Cañon."

"You're speaking about *the south fork of the Muddy,* are you?"

"Of course. All my calculations have to do with the south fork. You know that," the railroad builder snapped.

"So had the calculations of the Transcontinental engineers." Without the least change in his voice Waller let Dixon have the surprise right between the eyes. "But those of Redruth hadn't. *We're going down through Bear Creek Cañon to the north fork of the river.*"

"What!" exploded the other.

"Just as I say. We miss the Trout Lake district by more than thirty miles."

"But—" Dixon's thoughts choked words for a moment. "What in Mexico is Mr. Drake

doing in Washington if he isn't there to fight the Trout Lake reservoir project? What's all this row in the papers for months about the fight for an exit? Why did you want an injunction against young Marsh and his power plant if you didn't mean to go through that gorge?"

"Because I *didn't* want to make the fight over Bear Creek Cañon."

"You chose to make the fight over the wrong cañon? You foresaw what Sherwin would do and played up to his mistake? Is that it?"

"Of course. After he saw we were going to build the short line in spite of him there would be only one thing he could do—bottle us in the hills."

A reluctant admiration drove the amazement from the engineer's face as he began to comprehend the plan. "You saw all this from the first—and you talked Trout Lake all the time just to fool the enemy?"

"That was my idea. If Sherman had even guessed at the Bear Creek route we would have been lost. But he knew the Transconti-

nental surveys had all been to the south fork of the Muddy. When I announced mine as along the same route he did not doubt for an instant. It was inevitable that he would appeal to the government to stop us from going through Trout Lake Cañon. But now he has shot his bolt. The government will announce within three or four days the reservation of that basin. Even Sherwin couldn't get the Bear Creek Cañon reserved too—*if we once get possession and begin work there.*"

Dixon thumped a closed fist down on his knee joyously. "Sure he couldn't. Public opinion wouldn't back the government. I notice that papers all over the country are lined up for us already. The administration wouldn't dare back Sherwin's play twice——not with the election so close."

"No. We're safe there."

"And all this fight for Trout Lake was just to keep Sherwin's mind busy so that he could fool himself thoroughly. I take off my hat to you, Mr. Waller. You've missed your calling. You ought to be a general in a big war. Say,

I'd like to see Sherwin's face when he realizes what you've done to him. It's the first big beat ever was put over on him." Dixon came with a whoop to another phase of the situation. "And that young fellow Marsh holding Trout Lake Cañon with his army. This country never will get through laughing at the way you outgeneraled the steel trust."

Dick smiled with a flash of strong teeth. "If Welly gets any fun playing with his building blocks it wouldn't be right for me to interfere with him."

"If he's a chip of the old block that lad isn't going to like having it put over him so smoothly."

"Oh, Welly is a good sport. He'll play the game." Waller grew serious again almost at once. "But we haven't won yet, Mark. I'll not feel safe until I'm camped in Bear Creek Cañon and holding both entrances to it. I want you to move down to the cañon from this end and take half your outfit prepared to set to work there. Carry along provisions to last you five days. You ought to cover the distance

in four days. I'm going to start from our camps near Denver with a big outfit to-morrow morning. Twenty of us, with five pack horses, will push on ahead of the rest. We'll be armed and we'll hold the cañon against any possible surprise until you get there from this end and the supplies from the Denver camps reach us. Both of you ought to arrive about the same time."

"Is there really any need of the advance party? Nobody knows where we are going."

"No, but somebody might guess. They have their spies with us everywhere. No, I'll take no chances of not being on the ground first."

Dixon nodded. "You're right. Young Marsh might shoot a party across the hills ahead of us as soon as he finds we're moving."

"That's why I wouldn't give a hint of my destination to any of your force if I were you. Better let them guess. Announce each day at noon where you will camp that night. Start to-morrow morning if you can get ready in time."

"We'll be ready all right," Dixon answered.

CHAPTER XVI

AT HEYNER'S

WALLER took the noon train back to Denver. He reached his rooms at the University Club just about the time the theaters were emptying. Fifteen minutes later a piece of news bubbled over the telephone to him. He did not need to be told who was the young woman effervescing at the other end of the line.

"Oh, Dick, I've been trying to get you an age. They said you'd be back to-night—and I've called and called. I know the operator just perfectly hates me."

"I've just reached the city. What is this important matter, Miss Impatience?"

"Guess who is going up to Welly's camp to chaperone Selma and me. It's just perfectly dear of her to go—and I'll give you three guesses, Mr. Slower-Than-Molasses-In-January."

Waller guessed Miss Lyndon, and was told to go to the head of the class.

"She's just come down from Estes Park to go with us. I didn't *dare* let myself hope she would do it. But she's going. Can you hear me *gloat?*"

"Hope you'll have a good time, and I know you will."

"Oh, and Dick! We're going to-morrow. But Miss Lyndon wants to see you first if it's convenient for you." Her laughter rippled over the wire to mock him. "I said I didn't think it would be, but I'd try to let you know."

Late as it was Waller lost no time in getting Nora at the Savoy.

"I want to talk with you," she told him as soon as she knew who had called her up. "Won't you take me to that French place—Heyner's, isn't it?—and treat me to supper?"

"Won't I? I rather will," Dick almost shouted. "What golden luck! I was thinking it too late to call you up, but I did because I must leave town early in the morning. I'll be around in ten minutes."

"It will be a busy ten minutes for me and my maid. I'm in a dressing gown. But it isn't late at all—not for me. I'm a night owl. I'm *so* glad you called."

Richard thought it was like her that she did not try to keep out of her voice the throb of pleasure she felt at meeting him. While he dressed, and later while he waited in the outer room of her apartment at the hotel, his mind was full of her.

The allotted ten minutes were stretched before she came through the portières light as a wood sprite, with the flowing grace of motion peculiar to her, but he would have been ill to please who held the delay not justified. Her escort was no expert in the costumes of women. Pressed to the wall afterward, he could have told no more than that she was a symphony in white and gold. Her gown gave her personality full play and that was enough. As for this man—who acknowledged himself her lover in his heart—it was impossible for him not to answer with quickened blood beat the infinite seduction of her pure charm. It was

voiced rhythmically in the tender womanliness of the flexible lines, in the beautifully shaped head poised so daintily above the soft throat line, in the noble freedom of her bearing that made her for him a woman apart.

Her deep eyes were warm with gladness at the meeting. "I've been wanting to see you. How glad I am you called. Now we can talk over things. One hears bad reports about how the North Central Pacific has blocked you. They're not true, are they?"

"I hope not."

She studied for an instant his smile, the strong quiet confidence of the man, and dismissed her fears.

"Of course they're not. You'll tell me all about it at supper, won't you?"

He drove her to Heyner's in his car and they were shown up to a little private room opening from the upstairs porch where they were used to dine in warm summer evenings. The table, bright with silver and cut roses against the white linen, was attractive to the eye.

Waller relieved Nora of her cloak and handed it to the French waiter hovering in the background.

"What a jolly little room!" she said with a sigh of content after she was comfortably seated.

"Isn't it? On the built-for-two plan."

"Now tell me everything."

While he talked she felt again that impression of larger life, of breadth, of a door flung open through which she glimpsed a new and virgin empire subdued to man's uses by reason of the faith and resource and driving power of her friend. His rails were the pioneers of civilization. He was the builder of a state. So her imagination conceived him while he told his simple story.

"I *do* think you have done well."

"I have moments myself of thinking the fight for the Trout Lake Cañon a great piece of strategy. But I don't take the credit for it. It was your suggestion that we try to deceive the enemy as to our route. It was you who saw that our hope of salvation was to get their

minds focused on Trout Creek Cañon. I salute my chief."

A soft glow beat into her cheeks. "My part in it has been nothing. Men fight, you know, and women stay at home and wait. But I'm greatly relieved. From the papers I have been rather fearful, though they only told what we had been hoping for. But somehow the city's gloom was contagious. Its joy will be the greater when it learns the truth."

"Let's hope so. But we're not out of the woods yet. We have to make sure of Bear Creek Cañon, and after that we'll have to raise a great deal of money. Our guns will have to be trained on Winship of the Transcontinental. Don't you think it's about time to bring him down? We're after big game now."

"If we only could," she cried; and added after a moment. "I've met him. He seemed to like me. Would it do any good to write him?"

He felt an almost superstitious sense of her potency. She was the fairy godmother of the enterprise. From first to last she had been its good angel.

"It might do a lot of good for you to write."

"I don't see that it could do any harm," she admitted with a thoughtful little furrow between her eyes. "I believe I *will* write."

"I wish you would."

A pleased smile lit her eyes. "I'm his favorite actress, he told your uncle once."

"That shows good judgment. He'll certainly back the short line if it's put to him right. Miss Nora Lyndon is appointed a committee of one to interest him."

She nodded cheerfully across the table to him. "Miss Nora Lyndon accepts the appointment and will do her best."

Their talk was disjointed, for the waiter was in and out of the room a dozen times and the theme was one which could not be discussed in his presence. But to Waller the silences were more full than speech. The scene was set to soft lights and harmonious tints. Behind the drawn blinds rose the noises of the city, but he sat alone with the woman of his dreams. The delightful intimacy of it quickened his blood. His eyes were avid of her charms. She

was that amazing product of the ages—the American woman at her best. The spirited look in the long eyes, the clear coloring, the firm sweet mouth, the well-defined oval of the chin, even the high shoulders and the exquisite carriage of the slender body, were typical of the youngest among the nations. There was nothing exotic in her beauty, nothing that did not comport with perfect health both of body and mind.

All through supper she was a trumpet call to his emotions. The appeal of her was both to the senses and to the spirit, for her body seemed the perfect expression of his dear friend. Through the lift of the head, through the mobile face, above all through the eyes, in turn dreamy, wistful, abrim with laughter, or shadowed deep as inscrutable seas, the sweet soul of her spoke its changing nuances.

As the minutes passed her mood became a reflexion of his. With the clairvoyance of deep sympathy she understood and responded to his mounting passion. She knew that as soon as the waiter had left them finally the imperative

need to speak would master him, and she fought to hold her ground against the excitement that set a pulse palpitant in her white throat.

The conversation on their lips had no relation to that in their eyes. It had become a surface thing to veil the tumult of their hearts.

The waiter finished his needless attentions and retired softly with an air of discretion that amounted almost to indiscretion. Even after the door had closed behind him their futile talk continued. Waller found it hard to break the habit of reticence.

"I liked Harshaw. He acts with intelligence. I'm glad he is to be with you next year," his lips said; his eyes flashed, "I love you . . . I love you."

"Yes—if I don't rest until Christmas. It isn't quite settled yet."

She hardly knew what she was saying. The air about them was strangely electric. A hundred little unseen wires were vibrating between them.

He rose abruptly and moved to the wall. He looked without intelligence at a copy of Burne-Jones' "Love Among the Ruins." His brain still chanted the refrain, "I love you."

"They've been urging me to sign the contract, but . . . I don't know . . . perhaps . . . ."

Her make-shift sentence died to a whisper. He had swung around and was looking at her, the muscles of his clenched jaw standing out hard and taunt. The moment toward which the whole evening had moved was upon them. Her eyes fell, lifted again shyly, and once more yielded.

Dick went back to the table and stood over her. In her agitation she was making little geometric figures on the cloth with a spoon. He watched her fingers as they guided the silver bowl, but neither of them was aware of what she was doing. Her close presence went to his head like a sweet perfume.

His hand dropped lightly on her shoulder so that by chance the tips of his fingers touched the live pulse in her throat. The thrill that

went through his blood left him strangely weak.

For an instant neither stirred. Her heart forgot its beat—hammered fiercely to catch up that lost second. His finger tips read the register of her commotion.

She looked up without speaking, her face flushed and her eyes amazingly bright. He stooped and kissed her lips.

"My dear," she murmured, and the throb of passion was in her almost breathless cry.

Then, somehow, she was out of her chair and in his arms. A little spent sigh of content died beneath his kisses. She trembled with exquisite emotion, her soft warm body yielding to his embrace.

"Nora! Nora!" he whispered tumultuously.

"My dear lover," she confessed.

He kissed the tremulous mouth and the eyelids and the convolutions of the rosy ears that peeped through the waves of golden hair. It seemed he could not have enough of the lips he had longed for or of the wonderful eyes that

under their sheaths had responded to the touch.

"Richard . . . Richard!" she entreated in a low voice.

"I can't believe it yet. Shall I wake up and find I've been dreaming?" he laughed in sheer happiness.

"No, dear. It's true enough. I think it was true of me before it was of you." She too laughed softly, eager to confess her surrender to love, proud of it as all noble women are. "I didn't know it then, but it must have begun when I saw you with our Tuscans."

"And I was interested in you from the first moment. I loved you from the hour when you told me you had just played 'Cymbeline' in memory of my uncle."

The eyes that looked at him from under the long lashes were soft as mist. "I always knew you were good," she said simply.

"If falling in love with you proves it I'm superlatively good," he admitted with tender irony.

"Ah! But it's the real me you love," she

explained, regardless of grammar. "You don't care for me because I'm a well-known actress or because people say I'm good-looking."

"I love you because I can't help it. I can give a hundred reasons, any of them enough."

"I love to hear you say it. Oh, my dear, isn't it good—just to be alive—and to have each other?"

They looked through dewy eyes into each other's souls for a dozen heartbeats; then, drawn by the magnet of emotion, their lips met again.

CHAPTER XVII

CONCERNING LOVE—AND MARRIAGE

HER feet were the first to touch earth again, but it was a word of his that brought her down from the clouds.

"I can't believe it yet . . . that I'm really going to marry Nora Lyndon."

Into her eyes flashed a look of dread, almost of fear. It was as if he had reminded her of something unpleasant which she had forgotten.

"Let's not talk of that . . . yet."

He laughed delightedly. "We'll talk of anything you like, but I'll think of it when I'm up in the hills far away from you."

"But you mustn't." There was a suggestion of agitation in her low voice. "We love each other. Isn't that enough . . . dear?"

"It's enough for to-night . . . and for to-morrow . . . but not for next year. For love ends in marriage."

"Yes . . . yes, you've said it. Love ends in marriage . . . very many times. 'Who wins his love shall lose her'," she quoted. "It's especially true if he ties her hand and feet. Love is free. How can it live in bonds?"

It penetrated his joyous confidence that her feeling was more than one of mere modesty. The free woman in her was a protestant against taking up a yoke.

"Need marriage be loss of freedom—that is, of the liberty which is worth while?" he asked gently.

"It need not, but it usually is. Most people think of it as a right of possession, a right of legal monopoly. And it ought never to be that. Why should I claim more of you than you long to give me? Why should I try to dam up in you the life that overflows in friendship to other men and women? I want you, dear, to be mine but above all I want you to belong to yourself."

She had loosed herself from his embrace and was standing beside the table, a slender figure of grace with a shell-pink glow in her cheeks.

Though he had never seen another woman so untrammeled of mind, he had never met one before who seemed to trail clouds of glory in her wake. In spite of the mud with which life had spattered her she went her lightfooted way with an invincible purity born of the spirit and not of ignorance.

"But true marriage would not interfere with our personalities. It would develop them. Once I knew two lovers who had been drawn into such a unity of soul that each knew the other's unspoken thought and responded to it. They had grown old together with the completest confidence in each other, the most perfect understanding. Marriage had helped each to realize the fullest possibilities. I never saw two people more interested in life. They found a deepening joy in it."

She sighed wistfully. "They were perfect lovers—two out of a million. But how could they *know beforehand* it would be that way with them?" A troubled little frown rested above her eyes. "Longing for it wouldn't be enough . . . nor willing it. All lovers reach

for perfect happiness but few find it. Is it all chance, a caprice of fate?"

"Even so, isn't it better to back the chance of joy than to avoid it because it may bring loss?"

"But isn't there a way to make sure? That's why I object to marriage. It's so irrevocable."

"But necessary, none the less."

"Ye-es. I suppose so." Little color patches burned in her cheeks just below the shadows of the eyes. "It isn't that I don't want to marry you, dear. I do. I care for you . . . tremendously, but . . . sometimes marriage becomes . . . a hateful thing, a sin against your being." Her voice had dropped almost to a whisper. The eyes that had held bravely to his fell to the shamed cheeks.

He knew that her mind had gone back to the days when she had been chained by the law to a degenerate. Only a girl, she had given her love to a roué and he had stoned it to death. Waller could guess that pollution had touched her clean life many times before the man's tragic death had brought her release.

"I'll ask nothing of you that you don't want to give, dear heart. It shall be as you say about marriage—until you are quite sure."

She flashed a look of gratitude at him. "You'll understand, won't you? I believe in you as I do in myself. We love each other. We think it's for eternity. *But how do we know?* That's what I thought . . . the other time."

He nodded. "I know, sweetheart."

"It's so easy to say forever and ever when you care greatly." Her voice dropped to a whisper in which was the swell of rising tears. "But love dies . . . . At first you don't admit it. You try, oh, so hard! . . . There comes a time when you can't doubt any longer. Yet all the while . . . your vows have chained you to . . . to that which has now become a sin, since love has gone."

He took her in his arms with tender compassion. "My dear! My *dear!*"

She swallowed the sob in her throat and continued, a wan little smile on her lips. "You see

that the woman you love is a very serious-minded person. She thinks about all sorts of forbidden things. And that's not proper. It's much nicer to be docile and accept the verdict of society, which doesn't concern itself with *true* morality so long as the conventional letter of the law is satisfied."

He softly brushed back a stray lock of hair and kissed her forehead. "I thank God she is what she is."

"Then you don't think I'm dreadful and . . . unwomanly . . . because I think what I must?"

"I wouldn't have you different in the least. One of my hundred reasons for loving you is that you are free."

"And—you'll be patient with me?"

"I'll be too full of gladness that you love me to have any time for patience."

A smile bubbled into her eyes. "You do wrap things up so nicely, dear man of mine. I like you, oh, awf'ly."

By way of proof she drew his face down and kissed him once and again.

"Very pleased to know it—and you may tell me that way any time the spirit moves you."

She flashed a tilted smile at him. "It will only be when you are very, very good."

"I intend to get better every day," he announced.

They clung to each other, then drifted apart and back to their seats.

"Yes. Sit down and be—sensible." Her fond eyes mocked the reproof.

"Then don't look at me like that," he warned.

"I'll look at the clock. It's really time to go, but——"

"But love doesn't find us every day, so there's not the least hurry," he concluded.

"I've got something to tell you, but how can I while you tower above me so? I want your eyes on a level with mine. No—across the table," she laughed, as he dropped to one knee beside her.

"I can hear better when I'm close."

"You . . . *dear.*" Her fingers caressed for

a moment the thick wavy hair over his forehead. "Now do as I say, *boy*."

Like a soldier Dick rose, saluted, and wheeled to his place. The heart of him was lifted, for he still tingled to the touch of her light cool fingers.

"I want to tell you how I feel, as near as I can."

"You mean—about us?" he asked.

She nodded her head quickly.

"Then I'm all attention," he promised. "There's nobody on earth but you and me to-night—and no other subject worth mentioning."

"You dear madman," she mocked.

"Won't do, Nora. All lovers are mad, and since you're a better lover than I of course you're madder."

"Oh, I'm mad enough," she conceded gaily. "Why not, when the whole world's at my feet as it is to-night?"

"Since love is madness, let us shun plodding sanity. Eyes to the stars, sweetheart, for you and me together."

"Very well. I'll stay mad with you—and talk of love, Richard." She flung at him a look half shy, half daring, for it was the first time she had spoken his name except under the ecstacy of those magic moments that had made their desirous lips no longer strangers.

He put his elbows on the table and leaned toward her. "I listen, O Priestess of Love."

"Sometimes love is a fugitive thing. It winks into a life and winks out again. It doesn't relate itself to things as a whole. That's one kind of love . . . passionate, absorbing, intense, but ephemeral. Yet it is the real thing . . . while it lasts."

He divined beneath her lightness the note of a serious purpose.

"And the other kind?"

She drew a slow deep breath. "Ah, that's different! There's a page in Ellen Key's 'Love and Marriage'—if I had it here.—But take the old people you mentioned. They were as sensitive to each other's least shade of feeling as the strings of a violin are to the bow. They

didn't grow sated with love *because they fitted each other.* Wasn't that it?"

"Yes. Each year they understood each other better, I suppose; and their love grew in spite of that—or perhaps because of it. Yes, they fitted."

"And so life grew deeper and fuller to them. There were a dozen women in her, as many men in him, and things couldn't get humdrum because new points of contact kept appearing."

"Love unlocked the treasures of the world, you think?"

She pushed on eagerly. "Yes. To them the common things of every day existence were delights. Love kept them young."

"Ye-es, if you want to put it that way. They were full of a large content, but still they had a kind of—what shall I call it?—a sort of enticement for each other."

She pounced on the word triumphantly. "Of course, and this couldn't be exhausted because their union was both of the spirit and of the senses. It was the millionth case—a blend of

exactly the right proportion, soul and body fused to perfect harmony."

"Well, we're the two-millionth case," Dick claimed boldly.

"Are we? That's what we must find out. Would love in our marriage release all the better forces of our natures to joy and service? Would we come into that unity in which each individuality would be saved and yet merged with the other in a living stream? Oh, I know I don't make it clear, but——"

"We're made for each other. Do you think I'll let my mate escape me now I've found her?"

She held her hands out to him with a gesture infinitely tender. "I believe it—that we're mates, dear, and that we'll enter together into such joy as I've only dreamed about. But somehow I've got to make sure. For both our sakes I dare not risk . . . another horrible mistake."

There was reassurance for her in the grip of his strong hands, in the serene confidence of his smile.

"We'll take our time, sweetheart. It's

enough just now that we love each other. For me, I know my love will endure."

A passionate and yearning ache of all her young senses drew her to him. A film of tears clouded her sight.

"Oh, Richard, you do understand, don't you? It isn't that I'm fickle or that I don't know my own mind. I love you . . . I do love you. And there was never a man I trusted so much. . . . But there's something away down deep in me that won't let me go it blind. It wouldn't be right for me . . . again. Life has taught me that."

All the chivalry in him awoke in answer to her appeal. "I love you more because of it. We'll let all the to-morrows take care of themselves, my dear heart. To-night I love you and you love me. I cry content."

She nestled to him with a little purring noise like that of a kitten at peace. Her warm pliable body clung to his. Her hot cheeks surrendered to his kisses.

Waller's blood quickened to the call. This divine creature had come to him as the gift of

love. Her splendid womanhood had been given him to cherish and enhance. All the humility and the strength of his nature responded to the demand upon them. He had won her. With God's help he would see that her joy in him never waned.

CHAPTER XVIII

A LONG TREK

WALLER'S car hummed out to his construction camps in the foothills long before the sun was up. Two hours of sleep had been all he dared allow himself, but a shower bath had brought him glowing to his breakfast at an all-night restaurant on California Street.

The emotion of his adventure into love still burned strongly in him. As he drove the machine forward through the darkness his mind was full of Nora. He still saw her, grave and gracious, sweet and tender, with that perfect poise of the strong slender body that expressed the soul's freedom. He joyed in the exultation and exuberance of her pure young soul. She was, he told himself in his rhapsody, the song of a lark incarnate.

But with his arrival at the first camp all thoughts of Nora were banished. During his

last mile or two on the plain a faint morning light had been sifting into the sky, but in this precipitous pocket of the big hills it was still night. The camp was none the less astir with preparations for departure. Here and there lanterns winked like fireflies as they moved among the tents and the stables. Out of the darkness came the sharp orders of the foremen. Teamsters were hitching while the wagons were being loaded with tools, provisions, and supplies. One relay of men was still eating, though the cooks were raking the fires from their ranges and the big tents were being taken down over their heads. Already mule skinners were swinging the loaded wagons into the road that led up the hillside toward the Great Divide.

Waller turned his car over to the chauffeur he had brought with him and plunged into the work awaiting him. After a talk with the camp superintendent he was satisfied that all was moving as it should here. He mounted a horse that had been saddled for him and rode forward to Camp No. 2.

It was by this time daylight. As he descended into the little valley where the camp was located he saw that the work of dismantling it had stopped. Men were gathered together in groups engaged in heated argument. Waller went to the camp boss at once.

"What's wrong, McIntyre?"

"That fellow Tim Reilly has been breeding trouble among the blacksmiths. He's a walking delegate, he says, but I'll bet he's been seen by the North Central Pacific people."

Waller nodded. "I'll talk with the blacksmiths. In the meantime get the rest of the men to work. If we don't get started soon the wagons from Camp No. 1 will be here."

The strikers were gathered together as quickly as possible.

"What's your grievance?" Dick demanded amiably after he had greeted three or four by name.

Reilly pushed forward. He was a big heavy-shouldered fellow with hands like hams. His large underhung jaw was thrust out.

"We've got a sackful of them. Firs-st, the

pay's not enough. Second, there's no sense in trekking off into the hills like this. Where are youse taking us? And why?"

The lawyer looked him over coldly. "I'll not discuss this with you, Reilly. You came on the job to make trouble. You were fired last Saturday. You've no business here."

"Haven't I, Mr. Waller? I'll show youse about that. When I go the rest of the boys go."

"I don't believe it. They're not such fools as to throw up good jobs because you tell them to. Man, you've been paid by the N. C. P. to stir up discontent."

"'Tis a lie." Big Tim stepped forward threateningly.

Waller looked him steadily in the face. The trouble breeder weighed fifty pounds more than he did and the man's shoulders were round with the heavy packed muscles that lay there. He knew the men were watching him. It was a test of leadership. They would follow the better man, the one who after the old primal fashion survived the battle as master.

"Reilly, you're a bad lot. I'm paying top wages. You know it. I'm furnishing steady work in dull times. Yet you've been stirring up discontent. I serve notice on you to get out of this camp inside of five minutes."

"I'll see youse in hell firs-st."

"If you don't go I'll put you out."

Reilly was a bully of some note. His little eyes narrowed. "Youse haven't the guts to do it."

Dick caught him by the shoulder and flung him around. The man gave a bellow like a bull, crouched, and rushed.

Waller was a trained boxer in the prime of condition. To the last ounce he was master of the power that was his. Now he sidestepped lightly and lashed out with his left. Caught fairly between the eyes, Reilly was brought up short. Before he could recover his slow wits, Dick' right reached his mouth and crushed the thick lips.

The blacksmith howled in rage and rushed again. His arms worked like flails so that the

air appeared full of huge fists. The lawyer whipped right and left at him straight from the shoulder, ducked, danced out of danger after landing a punishing uppercut, and advised his foe to keep away.

The mutineer tried to close with him. He was slow and muscle-bound, but he knew he could beat the other by sheer strength if he could get hold and throw him to the ground where his skill could not avail. Waller evaded him easily. He was perfectly cool, and he struck each blow to hurt with all his weight behind it. The blacksmith, puffing like a fat porpoise, was taking a first class thrashing and doing no damage in return. His left eye was closing rapidly. From nose and mouth blood streamed. Watching him warily, Dick worked to the right, ducked a half-hearted swing, and closed with his man. Reilly went heavily to the ground and stayed there.

"Had enough?" the victor demanded.

Without a word the trouble maker gathered himself sullenly to his knees and got slowly to his feet. He was a badly demoralized bully.

With a soiled handkerchief he wiped his bruised face.

"That five minutes still goes, Reilly."

The deposed leader's glance went around to his followers in a questioning half circle. He found no comfort there. Silently he turned and slouched away.

"Anybody else want to go with him?" Waller asked.

There was no answer.

"Come! What's your complaint? Kick it out."

"Well, we kind 'o thought we'd ought to get more pay going so far from home."

"Aren't you getting top wages? When you came you knew we were going into the hills. Did you expect to build a railroad to Black Diamond without leaving Denver?" His voice had the sharp ring of command.

One of the men laughed sheepishly. "I reckon we haven't any real kick coming, Mr. Waller, leastways I haven't. Some of us got restless . . . and a leetle excited, I guess. That's all."

"You're being treated right then? Nothing wrong in the pay, the hours, or your grub? Let's have it out now, Henderson."

"I said I was satisfied."

"I can tell you the trouble," Dick went on curtly. "Too much whiskey in camp. I suppose Reilly brought it back with him yesterday."

Nobody answered, but he could tell by the furtive grins that he had hit the mark.

"Well, we'll overlook it this time. Now jump in and help load the wagons, boys."

After he was sure that Reilly had decamped Waller swung to the saddle once more and rode to Camp No. 3. The last wagons were being packed. Disappearing up the gulch could be seen a long line of slowly moving teams.

"Mr. Davis said you'd find him somewhere along the line," a driver explained.

Dick nodded, and cantered forward along the supply train. A good memory for names and faces was one of his assets of popularity. Now as he passed them he had a word for every teamster.

He found Davis, the camp superintendent, in the van.

"All right, Ben?" he asked.

"Everything going like clockwork, Mr. Waller. Where are we to camp to-night?"

"At Johnson's ranch."

"You'll be there with directions about where we're to go to-morrow?"

"I'll either be there or send a man back to you. I suppose my bunch of riders is ahead?"

"Yep."

About five miles in front of the first wagons Richard caught up with the advance guard of riders. There were about twenty of these, all well armed with rifles and revolvers. Five pack horses carried supplies to last them for a few days. The chances of any trouble with the N. C. P. obstructionists were slight, but the object of the cavalry was to forestall any chance of defeat.

Even the pack animals were in light marching order, so that they traveled fast. Late in the afternoon Waller sent back a rider with instructions as to the route for next day. Not

even the superintendents knew that Bear Creek Cañon was their ultimate destination.

Hour by hour they drew deeper into the mountains. Sometimes they followed gulches and again they crept along the shoulders of hills that led to virgin parks. Their guide knew every crooked trail that could be used as a short cut. Forests walled them in and great peaks rose snow white and blue ribbed above the ranges into which they had penetrated.

The advance party camped that night in a grassy draw beside a mountain stream. An hour's fishing in the darkness gave them trout enough for breakfast. Beside a great fire of dead timber they slept in their blankets with the sob of the pines in their ears. They were far up in the hills—nearly two miles above sea level—and the night was cold. A chill wind swept the draw, but they lay close to the shelter of a rock rim that broke the force of it.

Before daybreak their coffee was boiling and their bacon sputtering on the coals. Soon they were in their saddles again. They worked up

the south fork of Elk Creek and by noon were close to its headwaters. A second man was sent on the back trail with instructions to guide the wagons to that point.

Shortly after dark Waller's party reached Bear Creek Cañon. There was no sign of any prior occupants, but the railroad builder took no chances of being surprised. He stationed a camp at each end of the gorge and posted sentinels to guard against any possible attack. At intervals during the night these were relieved.

From each end of the cañon a man was sent to meet the advancing parties, one to serve as a guide to Ben Davis and the camps following him, the other to meet Dixon's contingent from Ptarmigan Pass. Meanwhile the advance guard which had possession of the strategic cañon busied itself with working out surveys so that the graders could get to work as soon as they arrived. Waller had with him Redruth's plans, giving in detail the method of approach to the gulch. One of the engineers who had helped Redruth make the survey was

with the party now and his familiarity with the ground made rapid progress possible.

Richard got in touch with Dixon by means of a messenger early next morning. The rider brought the cheerful news that before night the first wagons from Ptarmigan Pass would roll into the western gateway of the cañon.

It was about the middle of the afternoon that Dixon drove down Bear Creek and met his chief on a sorrel horse.

"Hello, Mark!" the latter sang out. "You're on time."

"I'm about three miles ahead of the first wagon. Everything is all right, is it?"

"Yes. You'll beat the boys from the other end of the road by about an hour. We're ready for the dirt to fly to-morrow."

Waller's prediction was close but not quite true. The shouts at the west end of the cañon at the arrival of the first of Dixon's wagons had hardly died away before there came a faint cheer from the eastern portal.

"What's that mean?" Dixon asked.

Waller smiled contentedly. "I expect that means Ben Davis is being welcomed to our city."

So it was. Before noon next day the last laggard wagon—with the exception of two which had broken down on the way—had reached the end of its journey. Before sunset four-horse plows were already furrowing the virgin soil between the river bed and the precipitous rock walls. The railroad dump was in process of construction.

CHAPTER XIX

IN A WORLD BEAUTIFUL

THROUGH a land that shone lustrous in the afternoon sunlight rode Waller on his way to Trout Lake Cañon. The trail took him through mountain parks and over flat-tops sown with sage-brush, into groves of pine and spruce, deep down to gulches where the shadows of night were already chill. From these he would emerge by devious twisting cattle trails into the uplands, where he could see again the blue and white peaks keeping their eternal watch over the solitary country.

Mid afternoon brought him to Trout Lake. He skirted its sedgy shore and followed the creek which brawled and gurgled down to the cañon of the same name. This took him through a gulch that opened midway to a grassy pocket still golden under the glow of the setting sun.

He was letting thoughts drift through his

mind—details about necessary camp supplies, estimates of grades, the promotion of a foreman. Like a golden thread ran in and out the edge of all of them a picture of the woman he was going to see. He brought to the meeting a touch of anxiety. How far had she during the past week escaped from him? Not for an instant did he blame her. She was separated wide as the poles from a flirt, a light of love. But her frank explanation had left him fearfully unsure of her.

How long could he hold the love he had won? There was at bottom a deep strain of humility in him. It was easily conceivable that a woman might grow tired of seeing his face across the breakfast table year in and year out. Many men were cleverer than he at small talk and racy nothings that pass current for wit. Might not her interest in him easily die?

A faint breeze-swept sound drew his attention. A stone's throw from him grazed a saddled horse, the bridle reins trailing on the ground after the Western fashion. Waller did not recognize the horse, but at sight of it his

heart jumped. That Nora Lyndon was its rider a sure instinct told him.

Almost simultaneously she came into sight down a little draw. Evidently she had been gathering wild flowers, for her arms were full of columbines. A long shaft of sunlight fell full upon her so that the flying tendrils of her hair gleamed like threads of spun gold.

"Nora!" he cried, and swung from the saddle.

His words stopped her. While he strode toward her she waited, slender and graceful, his welcome in her shining eyes.

Richard's doubts fell away from him. She was no longer the inscrutable mystery of woman but the tender dewy girl whose lover he was. The frankness with which her sweet lips turned to his was adorable. They clung to each other in silence, tremulous with happiness.

When at last their emotion broke into sound it was in little cries of incoherent fullness, such murmurs of delight as a child uses when its fingers wander over the face of its mother.

Her soul, aquiver with joy, found articulation in the pressure of her cheek against his rough coat, in the fast beating of the heart he held so close to his, above all in the long look that poured into his being love's tumultuous confession.

"I've missed you . . . how I've missed you, dear!" he broke out at last.

Her fingers clung to the lapels of his coat. "And I you, but . . . you've been with me every waking minute," she contradicted herself.

"Yes . . . It's been that way with me too. On the trek, in camp at night . . . everywhere."

"People are all around you," she murmured. "You meet them and talk with them . . . but they don't exist. You chatter nonsense to a dozen, but all the time you are alone with him . . . when you are in love."

"Adam and Eve alone in a world beautiful."

"That's it exactly. Haven't the mornings been heavenly? As if it were a world newborn and oh! so glad of it."

"And the nights . . . when all the babble of the day was stilled and the stars were out and the mountains only a murky shadow."

She nodded, then suddenly pulled his face down to hers and rained passionate kisses on it. "Oh, Dick, love me . . . love me. Keep it . . . better than my dreams. Don't let it fade away," she implored.

With his arms around her, the warm young body clinging to his, the fragrance of her hair in his nostrils, an irresistible strength glowed through his veins. By the divine right of love she was his. He had won her. He would keep her. No malign fate should thrust them apart. Mingled with this determination was a swift throb of delight in the passion that had moved her to such a fierce rush of feeling. Beyond all reason he was glad that she too was a creature of desire, that the primal woman coexisted in her with the purity he reverenced.

"I'm going to love you . . . and keep you . . . even against yourself."

In her smile he read the note of recurrent wistfulness. "Ah! If you only could," she

sighed. "But love isn't like that. It can't be forced. It finds its own channel."

"It *has* found its channel. It will flow on forever unless we dam up the river bed."

"And we'll not do that, will we? Our boat is on the current. We're adrift . . . together. We'll always have our great moments . . . songs in our hearts and sunshine along our path."

Their talk was strewn with fond little kisses. The last rays of the sun, crouched in a saddle of the hills between two peaks, played upon them like a spotlight, for the rest of the little valley had donned the shadow of approaching dusk.

"We must go back to camp," she reminded him. "Or they will be looking for me."

He caught her horse and lifted her into the saddle. As they moved out of the pocket their eyes met. Hers were extraordinarily soft and tender.

She began to talk, briskly and cheerfully, about the trek to Bear Creek. Was it finished to his satisfaction? Had he met with any

trouble? He must tell her the whole story of the march from first to last.

He told the tale, and as he talked the passional side of their love receded like a spent wave from the beach. It was enough to ride beside her in the gathering dusk, to look into the deep eyes that now were almost shadows in the pale face, to be within touch of the slim gallant little figure. The evening was very still. A wonderfully vivid sense of their aloneness came to him. The rest of the world was asleep or dead. Nothing mattered except that they were together in the great clean wind-swept hills.

Out of the gulch they rode into the valley which was at the western gateway of Trout Lake Cañon.

She pointed with her whip to a light on the edge of the creek. "Our camp."

The path was narrow. She took the lead. Tessie was the first to see her.

Miss Steel dropped the fishingrod she was carrying and ran forward.

"I've caught the *biggest* trout. Welly says

it will weigh two pounds. Oh, he's a whopper!"

"Welly or the trout?" asked Waller.

"Oh, *you're* here. Dick, we're having a *perfectly darling* time."

"How is Welly getting along with his power plant? Doesn't your perfectly darling time interfere with business?"

"We've discontinued operations," she informed him jauntily.

"Oh, have *we?* I wonder why."

"I'll tell you why. It isn't a secret any longer. The government has withdrawn Trout Lake basin for reservoir purposes." She tilted a saucy chin toward him. "Didn't I tell you that Welly was going to put a crimp in your plans, Mr. Empire Builder?"

Their host and Miss Glendinning came forward to welcome him. Waller shook hands all around.

"Tessie has just told me that the government has withdrawn the cañon for a reclamation project reservoir," he said to young Marsh.

"The news came three days ago. And the Central Colorado Power & Light company has gone out of business," he added with a grin. "Sorry to have got in your way, Mr. Waller, but I thought if you never got into the cañon you wouldn't be so disappointed when the government threw you out."

"Well, we can't both win," answered the lawyer with an enigmatic smile.

"You're a good loser."

"But I'd much rather win."

"Anyhow, you made a bully fight."

"Thank you."

Richard's eyes met those of Nora. Both of them were enjoying the joke.

The cook's call to dinner rang out on the triangle. Tessie clapped her hands.

"Everybody hurry up and get ready, I don't want my *big* trout to get cold."

Welly showed Waller into his own tent. "Hope you won't mind sharing with me. We're a little shy of accommodations." He moved the lantern to the other end of the tent and hung it on a nail. "Here's water and soap

and towels. If you need anything else sing out."

"Thanks. I'll do all right."

After he had washed, the lawyer ran a pocket comb through his hair and was dressed for dinner.

"It's not half savage enough up here. I came to be a squaw, but Welly gets the papers every day and telephones to Denver," complained Tessie at dinner. "It's all so kid glove that we don't get a chance to revert to type, whatever that means."

"Would you like to try the real thing?" asked Waller.

"Wouldn't we *just?* We're crazy to get a chance to putter around a camp stove instead of having it all done for us. Aren't we, Selma?"

Miss Glendinning confirmed the appeal.

"Then why not have it? Bear Creek is only a day's ride from here. The scenery is grand there and the fishing very good. We can take pack horses along with the tents and supplies. It will give you a real taste of roughing it."

"What a lark. Of course we'll go. All in favor say 'Aye.' Aye . . . Aye . . . Aye . . . The ayes have it," Tessie decided all in a breath.

"Do let's go," Selma appealed to the chaperone.

Nora hesitated. She was greatly taken with the idea, for she wanted to see the actual work Richard had told her about. Moreover, it would give her a chance to be with him and to see at first hand some of the difficulties he was overcoming.

"I'm afraid it will be too hard a ride for you girls. Isn't the way pretty rough?" she asked their guest.

"Not too rough, I think. Of course we're going deep into the mountains."

"Too hard for us! What nonsense! I'm tough as—as Jim's biscuits," Tessie laughed, as her pretty teeth bit into one.

Miss Lyndon turned to Marsh. "What do you think, Welly?"

"I'm for it. A day's ride won't hurt the girls any even if it does tire them."

"Then I don't see why we shouldn't go." She was still a little dubious. "You must telephone to Denver and let Mrs. Steel know. If neither she nor Mrs. Glendinning have any objections we'll move to Bear Creek."

Tessie waved above her head a bottle of Worcester sauce. "Hurrah!"

"Don't be too enthusiastic," warned Richard. "There will be no cook along. You'll have to take turn about washing dishes and frying trout. You'll not be a young lady of leisure."

"Do you think I'm just an ornament? I'll pay my way, sir. You'll say you never did eat such pancakes.'

"When can we start?" Marsh asked.

"The sooner the better. When can you hear from Denver?"

"To-night."

"And oh Welly! kiss the blarney stone before you talk to mother," urged Tessie.

CHAPTER XX

WELLY MARSH MEETS A SURPRISE

TESSIE, wrapped in a blanket, leaned back against a boulder and stretched her feet to the fire. She did not remember ever having been so comfortable before. Stiff and hungry from a long thirty miles of travel, she had helped cook supper while Waller and Marsh, with the aid of Dixon and Davis, had put up the tents and prepared the beds for the night. But now they had eaten. She had the pleasant sensation of having earned a rest. Drowsy in the warm fire glow, she was ready to purr like a cat in the Spring sunshine with sheer physical well-being.

"This *is* something like. I'm reverting to savagery at about the rate of a mile a minute. Truly I'd love to be a blanket squaw and live in a tepee."

"If you're going to be a squaw you'll have to get up and throw those pine knots on the fire, Tessie," suggested Welly lazily.

"I'm not going to begin until you've put them on."

A flickering flame shot out from the camp fire and brought momentarily the oval of Nora's pale face from the shadow. Her eyes were aglow with delight of this new experience.

"Is it because we are hothouse bred that we love it? Is it just the twentieth century restlessness always demanding to be amused with a change? Or is there some survival of the cave woman in us, some ancestral savagery that drags us back to the open sky and the sweep of the wind?"

Waller, from the shadows, waited for the next leap of flames to reveal her, golden and delicate and yet strong, with the deep glow of incomparable eyes from a face charged with mysteries and reserves. He thought it a far cry from the cave woman to this heiress of the ages.

Dixon, stretched full length and leaning on an elbow, took up the thread of talk.

"You've heard of the acid test for metals, Miss Lyndon?"

"Ye-es. It proves the gold, doesn't it?"

"There's an acid test for men too. Take a fellow out of the city, away from his clubs and his electric push buttons and his stock tickers, and set him in the everlasting hills, with the shadow of the great peaks rising stark against a sky of stars and the winds playing strange tricks through the pines. If there's anything to him it sifts the gold from all the meanness and selfishness that have encrusted him."

Waller looked at his engineer in mild surprise. He had never before heard that energetic bundle of nerves talk of anything more romantic than a four per cent. grade.

"There's something in that, you know," agreed Welly sagely after a pause. "The trouble with the twentieth century is that it's too civilized. We're decadents. What we need is to be thrown back to wrestle with na-

ture. I never have enjoyed myself more than I have this last month bossing a gang of Dagoes and Greeks."

"Take that letter the rescuers found on Captain Scott's body after he had discovered the South Pole. Back in civilization I suppose Scott struck an average with his neighbors, but one can't read the letter without knowing that down in those ice fields he was a hero," spoke up Ben Davis, himself an Englishman.

Tessie carried the conversation back to nonsense. "Of course I'm going to have a big tepee built for a garage," she explained.

"And you'll want a drug store where you can get nut sundaes and chocolates," Selma assisted.

"Yes, and an e-nor-mous tepee where we can give dances."

Welly fell into the spirit of it. "And you'd need a department store where you could get the latest thing in Navajo blankets and beads and eagle plumes. . . . And of course a hotel where you could give little luncheons—stewed dog, and that sort of thing, you know."

"The improvements would be more permanent if they were built of wood, or better still of brick," suggested Dick slyly.

"Which brings us back to the modern city and civilization," laughed Nora. "I suppose the truth is that we women can enjoy a relinquishment of luxury only when we don't really have to give it up."

"This particular squaw is going to fall asleep in about five minutes if nothing happens," murmured Tessie drowsily.

"But something is going to happen." Welly jumped up, caught her hands, and pulled her to her feet. "Beat out a rag on your tom-tom, Chief Build-a-Railroad-in-a-Hurry."

Before Waller got the point the boy began to whistle a dance tune and waltzed Tessie across the grass to the door of her tent. He followed her inside to light the lantern. She fumbled along the tent pole for the matches. Marsh, standing close behind her, tilted back her chin with one hand while the other slid around her waist.

"I haven't had a kiss for an age, Tess."

"Sh-h! They'll hear," she cautioned.

"No, they won't—and I don't much care if they do."

Their lips met in a long kiss.

"Silly," she murmured.

"Do you love me, Little Squaw?"

"A little, Big Chief."

"You mean heaps. You've got to mean heaps."

"Why have I?"

"Because I'm daffy about you."

She laughed softly and pulled him down to whisper in his ear.

"And me about you, Welly."

He caught her closer and kissed her again and again, for it was not often she confessed her love.

Three minutes later a light flickered in the tent and presently Marsh emerged into the open.

Presently he met Miss Lyndon's amused eyes. His danced saucily.

"Couldn't find the matches," he whispered to the chaperone.

At which she laughed. It happened that she was a lover herself.

Waller gave orders for a general break-up.

"Time to turn in, ladies. You've had a hard day and must be tired."

His fingers met those of Nora for an instant before she retired. Very soon she went to sleep to the sound of the wind gently slapping the fly of the tent.

A long narrow shaft of sunlight beat through the tent flap and lay a golden bar across the cheek of the sleeping young woman. She stirred uneasily, opened her eyes drowsily, and rested in that indolent coma which is on the borderland between dreams and consciousness. She lay there smiling, a pleasant glow in the back of her mind. Something delightful had happened. What was it?

The answer flashed into her brain and wakened her more fully. Richard Waller had happened of course. She was in his camp on Bear Creek—had arrived there with her friends after dark the evening before. Jubilant as a girl, she jumped up and went vigorously

through her setting up exercises. Nora Lyndon had never been counted an athletic prodigy, but there were few of her sex that would not have envied the rythmic flex and flow of the muscles under the satin skin, the pliant grace of the lissom body.

Welly Marsh emerged from his tent at the same time she appeared. They were in a little saucer-shaped valley at one end of which opened the eastern gateway of the gorge. As the two strolled down to the river bank the sound of an explosion boomed down from the cañon.

"What's that?" asked Marsh quickly.

A smile danced into her eyes. "I think it must be the grade builders. I understand they are blasting a way along the rocky wall."

From the edge of the stream the young man could look into the cañon and see scores of scrapers and plows at work.

His surprised glance came back to her. "What's going on?"

Their host had ridden out of the gorge and was waving a broadbrimmed hat at them.

"Better ask Mr. Waller," advised Nora.

He did.

Richard smiled genially. "Didn't you know that Miss Lyndon and I are building a railroad—with some outside help?"

"But not here. Why, your road bed doesn't come within thirty miles of Bear Creek. It heads for the south after leaving the Trout Lake district."

"Does it?"

"It must, if you're going to strike the Muddy."

"Not to strike the north fork of the Muddy."

"The north fork. You can't reach that through Trout Lake Cañon."

"It's fortunate that we don't want to reach it by that route, since the government has decided to hold the cañon for a reservoir site."

"Don't want to go through the cañon. What do you mean? A child would know that a survey along the rim above is folly."

"I'm trying to tell you that we never have wanted to use Trout Lake Cañon. Our sur-

veys don't take us within thirty miles of your camp."

Welly took a moment to digest the news. Its import even yet had not penetrated his brain, though it was beginning to dawn upon him that he had been tricked.

"But—Good Lord, why were you asking for an injunction? Why were you sweating blood when we beat you to the cañon? What are your surveyors fooling around the rim above for? I may be an idiot of sorts, but I see what's plain before my eyes."

Nora's musical laugh rippled out. "Welly, he's been fooling you. He didn't want your old cañon, but he had to stir up a dust there so that you wouldn't put a cork in ours."

The face of young Marsh was a study in chagrin, incredulity, and amazement. "Do you mean that he knew from the first he was going this way?"

"From the very first," Nora nodded blithely.

"And all that Washington fight was a bluff?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd hate to sit in with you at poker, Mr. Waller." His face broke into a grin. "What a sell on Dad! Great jumping Moses, what a take in! He'll be red hot when he hears it. Wow! I can hear him sizzle."

With a whoop of joy the boy gave himself up to mirth unmitigated at thought of the paternal rage. Nora and Richard joined less boisterously.

Tessie's head appeared, the canvas of the tent flaps discreetly nipped beneath her chin to conceal apparel still somewhat négligée.

"What's all the fun about?" she demanded. "Keep some of it till I come."

"It won't wait," Marsh called back. "Great Scott, but you've put one over on us, Mr. Waller."

"We did our best," the other man agreed.

"Think of me spending ten thousand dollars to cork up the gorge, and you laughing up your sleeve all the time. Anyhow, it wasn't my money. Won't Sherwin rip somebody's hide off just? It wouldn't surprise me if you made a go of your railroad now."

"It would surprise me if he didn't," Nora said quietly.

The sound of the breakfast gong beaten by Dixon, who had volunteered to prepare the first meal in camp, diverted their attention.

After they had eaten Waller showed them through the cañon. The scene was one of ant-like activity. In the open ground just above the gorge a town had grown up as by magic. White tents dotted the draw. Stores, blacksmith shops, powder houses, forges for sharpening tools, had been flung together in an hour to serve the needs of the gathered workers. To Nora this mountain camp appeared a melting pot of the races. Slavs, Greeks, Italians, Hungarians, Japanese; all of them were represented in the turbulent picture. Always a woman of imagination, the spell of the drama was upon her. Here was the throb of life, raw, crude, primitive. Without knowing it each man was contributing his atom to the unborn future. Their toil was all fused to a common purpose by the man who controlled and animated their energies, the bronzed undemon-

strative American riding by her side whose keen eyes saw every detail even while he answered their questions.

In her heart she hailed her lover proudly as a man among men. He was doing a big thing, opening a rich country to build a great state, and he was pushing it to success without any self glorification as if it were merely the day's work. But she knew there burned in him a light that made the enterprise one which could not be estimated in dollars and cents. For all the shrewd business sagacity he gave to it, the building of the road was a crusade, a trust committed to him in behalf of many thousands of his fellow citizens.

CHAPTER XXI

A NIGHT ON THE LEDGE

A WINDING trail ran up the slope from the gateway of the cañon and lost itself in the pines far above. Waller led the way, Marsh and he carrying the luncheon they had provided themselves. The white-ribbed summit of Old Baldy, scarred and rugged with the erosion of numberless centuries, rose in front as a challenge to the climbers.

It had been Tessie's idea that they should climb the old sentinel of the Rockies and the others had fallen in with the plan readily enough. As they nooned in the sunshine far up the first shoulder of the mountain they could look down into the gorge where men and teams moved to and fro like ants. The river, a crooked thread of silver, wound between the rock walls to the park beyond. In the perspective it took faith to believe that these pigmy

scratchers of the earth could ever tear through the barrier built by nature that had stood for a million years with its prohibitive "Thus far and no farther."

Bathed in the pleasant September sunshine they ate lunch merrily and rested for a few minutes afterward. When they renewed the attack Waller was still in the van with Nora beside him. The going got steadily stiffer as they advanced along the shoulder of the peak and gradually the gap widened between them and the rest of the party.

Nora was a mountaineer of experience. She had done several of the less difficult Alpine ascents. If she was slender, she was yet deep-bosomed. Her very delicacy was silken strong. Through the clear transparency of her skin glowed a rare tint which deepened beautifully with exercise.

So Richard thought as he watched her take the rock wall rising almost vertically above them for a hundred and fifty feet to the summit. Her delight was keen-edged, for the climb offered difficulties enough to stimulate

the blood. Courage she had of nature, and to back it a quick eye and a sure foot. Across and up the face of the wall she followed her leader, making use of every ledge, crack, or projecting roughness that offered a hold. She moved with a spring, lightly and certainly, so that her guide trusted her as he would himself. He exulted in the high spirit which made the slight danger a joy to her as to himself. It was another link in the chain of comradeship that strengthened their love.

Half way up they came to a ledge above which the wall rose sheer.

"We'd better follow the ledge," Richard suggested.

Gradually this narrowed and ran out. Together they took survey of the situation.

"Don't you think that if you lowered me I could reach that scrub oak and work along the cliff from it? If there is a chance that way I'll let you know.'

He hesitated. Like her, he was keen to succeed. It was their joint adventure and he wanted it to end in victory. With her pleading

eyes making warm eager little leaps into his caution seemed a cold virtue. Moreover, there could be no real danger if she was careful.

"All right," he nodded.

Carefully she worked her way over the edge, disposing of her short skirts as she moved. One little gloved hand was held in the strong grip of her comrade. He was kneeling on the ledge, one palm pressed against it to steady him. For an instant most of her weight was upon him. Inch by inch he lowered her until her foot found its hold upon the root of a stunted oak and her hand a grip on a projecting outcrop of granite.

"Good," she sang out cheerily.

But before he released her hand Waller spoke his word of caution. "You'll be careful, won't you?"

"Trust me,"she nodded.

Presently she had gone far enough to pronounce that she thought the new way feasible. With some difficulty Dick lowered himself. Already he was regretting having yielded to the impulse of adventure. If they should come

to an impasse they would find themselves in a *cul-de-sac,* for he knew it would be impossible for them to return to the ledge.

The thing he feared came to pass. From her position in the lead she turned to tell him that they were stopped by a stretch of smooth rock which offered no foothold.

He craned over her shoulder to see and at some shift of his weight a long flat stone slipped and went crashing down the precipice. Instantly he released her shoulder and caught at a root to save himself. Next instant he was on his knees, slowly slipping down while he fought for a hold.

Nora turned and caught his arms above the elbows. His feet were searching for a brace. It was astonishing what strength there was in her little wrists. She clung to him with grips of steel. The strain on her was terrible. Slowly her back bowed under his weight. He was sliding down almost imperceptibly and dragging her with him.

Their eyes met.

"Let go," he ordered quietly.

"No."

More sharply. "Let go," he commanded.

She shook her head.

Then his foot found a rock crevice and the pull of his weight was lifted from her. Warily he dragged himself up and stood beside her.

The blood had ebbed even from her lips. She was trembling like an aspen leaf in the breeze.

Again their eyes met and spoke the feeling too deep for words. They had faced death together and each had thought of the other first. At the risk of her own life she had saved his in spite of his protest.

"A near thing," he said in a low voice that broke.

Dry sobs shook her and she buried her face in his coat. He kissed softly once and again her golden hair.

Soon she was herself once more. "What a goose I am!" she told him with a fair imitation of brisk lightness.

It did not take them long to discover that they could not get back. The flat rock Richard had displaced had been a necessary step in

the rock ladder of the climb. On their shelf in mid-air they were fast prisoners, unable to move forward or back, up or down.

"It's up to Welly to rescue us," Dick decided out loud.

In his heart he was troubled. Marsh could do nothing for them without ropes and more help. It was now close to four o'clock. If he went at the greatest possible speed it would be impossible for him to get back before dark. This would mean that the rescue must be postponed until morning.

Waller cursed the folly that had led him into this. At best Nora must spend a whole night without wraps upon a sloping ledge eleven thousand feet above sea level. What effect this might have upon one accustomed to no exposure more severe than a walk in furs on a frosty morning he trembled to think. He could not thank his lucky stars enough that some impulse had led him to bring his sweater to the summit instead of discarding it where they had lunched.

Presently Wellington Marsh appeared alone.

"The girls have had enough. They've started back to camp," he called up, adding at once: "How am I to reach that eagle's cliff on which you two are perched?"

Richard explained the situation and the two men discussed it. The obvious thing to do was to go for help and a rope.

"You'll be all right while I'm gone?" Welly shouted anxiously.

"Yes. You'll have to reach us from the top. There's a way up by a gully in the rear. Dixon knows it."

They watched Marsh till in his descent he dropped behind the shoulder of the mountain.

Nora turned smilingly to her companion. "Exit Welly. I wonder when he'll be back."

"I'm afraid not to-night."

"It might have been a good deal worse," she said philosophically. "If there hadn't been this ledge handy. . . . Or if Welly hadn't been here to go for help."

"Yes," he admitted without enthusiasm. He could not forget that his folly had opened the

door to their prison or that his carelessness had thrust away the chance of retreat from it.

She did not share his regrets or his fears. A well-spring of delight bubbled up in her; for life had brought them to an adventure they must share together, had just carried them through another that had knit their hearts more closely. But with the clairvoyance of love she knew how bitterly he was reproaching himself and she set to work to make him forget.

"Isn't it good, Dick? Aren't you glad?" she asked with a happy little sigh.

"Glad?" His surprised eyes swung around to meet hers.

"Of course. I'm happy, dear, because I'm surer than I've ever been that we . . . belong for ever and ever."

He drew in a deep breath of the clean cold air. "God knows how I love to hear you say that. Some women would hate me for the stupid thing I've done."

"Hate you because we shall be together all through the dear night?" she asked softly.

A glow stirred at his heart but he fought it down. "Ah! but you've got to suffer, and it's my fault. I can't escape that."

"Dear . . . dear, I don't want to escape it," she murmured. "Love is not complete until it has suffered. And we . . . we'll bear together whatever we must."

He could not miss the look of ineffable content on her face. It flooded him with a warm wave of joy. Yes, they would suffer together. It would be his privilege to comfort her through the long hours. He knew that when the bitter cold tortured her soft flesh his heart must be wrung with pity, but he thanked heaven it had been given him rather than another man to be with her through the pain.

The timidity of a lover venturing on holy ground was in his voice. "And you're sure at last . . . that it is for ever and ever?"

She gave him a long look of her deep fearless eyes. "As sure as I can be . . . now."

The blood quickened in him. "You mean—?"

He stopped, afraid to take too much for granted lest he suffer a rebuff.

Her hands went out to him in a gesture of infinite giving.

"Take me, dear. Every fiber of me is yours so far as I know now. I want to give myself to you . . . for better or worse. I want to be your wife, dear lover."

"My wife!" His lips framed the words in a whisper. "My dear, dear wife!"

Into her face of ivory a faint color flowed. "Not in the world's way yet, but in love's way. As a free woman ought, Richard."

"I don't care about the way," he cried. "Nothing matters but love, my beautiful wife."

She lifted eager questioning eyes to his. "Do you really think me that . . . beautiful?"

"I think that all the beauty of the earth is a part of you. The sun—you've garnered its sheaves in your hair and in your loving heart. You're as clean as fire . . . or the hills . . . and as lovely. You've come straight from God to me, my beloved."

"I'm glad. I'm so glad," she answered. "I'd

like to be a hundred times more lovely—for you."

He drew her closer. The clean passion of the man mounted as he kissed the flush in her cheek, the vivid clinging lips, the pulse in the round throat that registered her excitement. His nerves quivered. She lay very still in his arms, heart beating against heart, her soft breath on his neck.

When they talked, it was with love's incoherent rhapsody. For this was their spiritual betrothal. Hitherto their love had been tentative. Now she made a free offer of it with the proud humility of a woman who knows that the gift she brings is the greatest in the power of any of her sex.

In front of them the sun descended, slipped down into a saddle of the saw-toothed range, and the shadows in the valley crept higher and higher. Behind the great hills the ball of fire sank, leaving a brilliant lake of gold, garnet and tourmaline above the purple peaks. Slowly this faded to a monochrome as the violet dusk enveloped the mountains and blurred detail in a velvet haze.

They talked of many things, laughter on their lips, an underflowing pulse of emotion ever close to the surface. It mattered little what they said, for all roads of speech led to love. They caught each other's feelings in swift plunging glances, each other's thoughts in words and exclamations instead of sentences.

After the dusk fell a star came out, then another and another till the heavens were full of them, all clear and cold and infinitely far. With a little shiver the woman's hand groped for that of her comrade and found comfort in his strong warm grip.

Perhaps it was the vast silence of the night that suggested smoking.

"I wish you'd light your pipe, dear. It will be cheerful."

"Haven't it with me. Will Welly's cigarettes do?"

She struck a light for him and on impulse asked for a cigarette. A little surprised, he gave her one.

Nora shook her head, laughing. "No, I

don't smoke—as a rule—sometimes on the stage. But to-night—well, to-night's an occasion. I smoke because my lover does—for comradeship."

He cupped his hand to shield the blaze of the gasoline lighter, so that for a moment her vivid mouth and delicate nostrils stood out in the darkness.

She slipped her hand under his arm. For a minute neither spoke, though the tips of their cigarettes glowed companionably.

Nora waved her hand into space. "We've got lots of company. Every star is a cigarette tip. We're having a smoker to celebrate our . . . . "

"Our wedding night," he suggested in a low voice.

Her eyes flashed quickly at him to make sure he meant the words in a figurative sense.

"Let's call it our betrothal night, then—"

"I'll still have our wedding night to dream about and long for. Content, dear heart."

With the setting of the sun the temperature had dropped, as it always does in those alti-

tudes, and a thermometer would have shown a mercury still falling. Fortunately the shape of the cliff protected them from the wind. Waller had removed his sweater before sunset. Now he wrapped Nora in it and buttoned it tightly about her. Over her thin gloves he drew his heavy mountain gauntlets.

She smiled her thanks. "You're stripping yourself for me. When it gets really cold you'll have to take the gloves back."

As the hours dragged their interminable length the talk became one-sided. Nora did her best to be cheerful, but she was facing the ordeal already. Through her thin shoes and stockings the cold was biting to the tender flesh.

Once she asked him what time it was. He looked at his watch and told her it was 11:43.

"The night is more than half done. As soon as it is daylight they can see to rescue us," he added cheerfully.

"Yes. We'll laugh about this to-morrow," she answered with a wry little smile.

Her lover bit his lip and choked back a sob

of pure pity for her. He knew how deep the cold was striking. From his lips poured a stream of talk through which ran the comfort of sympathy and love.

Several times she insisted that he take back his gloves, but he would not consider this. He was all right, he told her. Sometimes he would beat his arms as cabmen do and make her exercise the same way. He had undone his belt and fastened it around her waist so that he might have a hold in case she grew stiff and slipped. For the most part they crouched against the rock, but whether they sat or stood his grip never for an instant released her except to chafe her freezing arms.

Shortly after midnight they heard shouts. It was perhaps an hour after this that a call came down from the summit above. Several efforts were made to lower a rope, but in the darkness none of these succeeded.

About two o'clock she voiced a pitiful little question.

"Do you think, dear . . . are you quite sure that . . . we can stand it till morning?"

"YOU'RE THE PLUCKIEST LITTLE WOMAN I EVER MET."

"Not the least doubt about it. Dearest, it's tough, but we've got to buck up against it."

"I know." She broke down and sobbed quietly, her face buried in his coat. "You're so brave. You don't complain . . . and you look out for me . . . but I'm only a little coward."

"You're the pluckiest little woman I ever met."

"I'm not. I'm a . . . what Welly calls a quitter. But oh, Richard! I can't stand it. I can't."

She was so stiff and cramped that she could not stretch her limbs. For a quarter of an hour he worked over her trying to restore the circulation. Twice already he had slipped off her shoes and rubbed the little feet till she had cried with the agony of returning life. Then he had snuggled them under his coat and vest so that the warm blood from his heart might transmit its glow to her. All the time she had sat in tears of pain and wan little smiles for the tenderness with which his love wrapped her.

"You're so good to me . . . so good," she sobbed.

As soon as the numbness had left her feet he made her thrust her arms under his coat and vest around his body. As best he could he buttoned the garments at the bottom, holding her close so that she might get the warmth of his body from head to feet.

It was characteristic of her that in spite of her condition she could still fling at him through her tears a twisted little smile. Once she whispered in his ear so low that it was almost a sigh.

"I do love you, dear."

In the Rockies the temperature is usually the lowest just before day breaks, but this is sometimes modified by atmospheric conditions. About three o'clock a warm wave swept up the mountain side from the valley so that within half an hour the thermometer would have showed a rise of nearly forty degrees.

Her circulation restored by the transmitted heat of his body, a reaction of languor stole over her. She was tired with the long night

vigil and the pain she had endured. Sleepily she nestled closer to him.

"It's not so bad as it was. I'm not wretched now—only sleepy, dear."

"Go to sleep then."

He rearranged their position, crouching on the ledge with her in his arms and her head on his shoulder.

"Was there ever a man like you, I wonder?" she asked, and held her lips up to be kissed.

Presently her eyes closed. With slight movements of her soft body she snuggled closely to him. She sighed ever so faintly from returning physical content. The breath came gently and regularly between her slightly parted lips. She slept.

Waller's limbs grew numb with the rigid constraint of their position. Though he had warmed her, it had been by giving his own vitality. His coat and waistcoat were open and could not be closed without awakening her. The cold pressed against his spine like an ice wall. He would have given anything to stretch his legs and his arms so as to shake

the cramp out of them, but he feared the least movement might disturb her.

Faint streaks of light began to fleck the sky. From the summit Welly's voice called down encouragement occasionally. Dick had given orders to have a good fire going, blankets warmed, and hot coffee ready against the time they should be needed.

Her supple body stirred in his arms. The eyes, soft as pansies, opened and looked at him in wide surprise. Gradually memory brought back to her a vision of the bitter night.

His laced fingers had held close to her body his numb arms, but as soon as these were released they fell stiffly to his sides.

She cried out in contrition and began to work over them as he had done with her.

"Why did I let you? Why didn't you waken me?" she reproached.

Her lover smiled, and in that smile she read his answer.

"I wish I were good enough for you . . . I wish I were," she cried softly, a film blurring her eyes.

"Ridiculous," he pronounced promptly.

Her answer was to stop for a moment the gentle massage and kiss the palms of the hands that had grown useless in her service.

"Don't!" he protested, almost sharply. "It's not . . . right."

Her eyes were like stars in their brightness. "Why not? They gave me their best. To keep me warm they have gone cold and numb. All I can give them is my gratitude . . . and my love. Poor dear hands!" And she kissed them again.

Welly's voice came down. "I believe it's light enough now. Look out for the rope."

They maneuvered a long time for position, Waller directing their movements. At last the rope came within reach.

Richard turned to Nora.

"I don't want to go first and leave you here," she pleaded.

He took her in his arms and laughed. "Then shall we both stay?"

"Oh, I know," she admitted. "You can't go first, but—"

He fastened the loop in such a way that Nora sat in it and held to the rope above.

"Ready?" Marsh sang out.

"Not yet. You're not afraid, are you, dear?"

"Yes," she nodded with a pale smile. "I don't want to swing out there. It's such a long way down."

She shuddered as she clung to him.

"It's just like going up in an elevator. Don't look down—and hang on tight."

They kissed each other again and he gave the signal. She was lifted from the ledge and swung into space. Slowly unseen hands pulled her up.

"I'm not afraid any more," she called down to him.

"Of course you're not, for you're only taking an elevator for breakfast on the roof garden," he laughed.

But he spent an anxious three minutes before the word was shouted down that Miss Lyndon was safe.

The rope dropped down a second time and

Waller stepped into the loop. He went bumping up the wall and was pulled over the edge of the precipice. Even before he had finished thanking the men his glance passed to the fire, in front of which sat Nora wrapped in warm blankets, a cup of steaming coffee in her hand.

She had been watching the rescuers intently. Now she called to her comrade, a quaver of joy in her throat.

"Come and get your coffee."

He moved toward her. "Why aren't you drinking yours?"

"I wanted to play fair and start even," she told him.

But her eyes said more. It seemed to him that they were throwing eager little kisses at him.

CHAPTER XXII

A NEW GUEST

NORA slept intermittently through the day that was still young when they reached the camp and without interruption through the ensuing night. Youth has quick recuperative powers, and when she emerged from the tent upon the second morning Waller could find in her appearance no trace of the terrible experience on the ledge.

He was fishing for breakfast trout and she came to him immediately with that unrestrained grace of line which her every step remodeled. No self-consciousness more definite than a faint rose bloom in the cheeks troubled her.

From the bank above she spoke. "Good morning. I have brought you your sweater and your gloves, sir."

"But it's what was inside of them that I want."

She laughed softly, in a kind of girlish rapture. "I've brought it too—quite near enough. You must travel the rest of the way yourself."

He traversed it in half a dozen long strides, so purposefully that she was afraid he had forgotten it was broad daylight. But a pressure of the hand was all he allowed himself, except a long look deep into her eyes.

"You're quite well again? Feel no bad effects?"

"Except an immoderate hunger," she qualified with a smile.

It was as if she had lifted a weight from his heart. "Nora girl, I've been worried . . . awf'lly. I never could have forgiven myself if . . . "

An impulsive hand rested on his sleeve to chide. "Don't think of it that way . . . dear. We had our moments. I want to remember every one of them—except the one when you were slipping from the ledge. But the rest . . . when the sun went down and left us so close to the heart of beauty . . . when you talked comfort to me . . . and held me in your

arms so that the life flowed back into my blood . . . when you breathed on my poor feet to warm them and cuddled them close to your heart . . . Oh Dick, I wouldn't take a gold mine for the least of them."

The throb of a poignant emotion was in her voice. She had opened her heart to him. He thought her an incomparable lover.

"Nor I."

"We'll forget them only when we have so many golden moments together that we haven't time for memories."

"And when will that be, my mate?" he asked eagerly.

She answered his ardor lightly, but with a deepening tint in her cheeks. "When the battle's fought and won. Mars before Eros, sir."

"I'm to make the line a sure success first. Is that it?"

She nodded her head quickly.

"Then I'll have to kidnap Winship and bring him out here."

"He's on his way here now, but he doesn't

intend to stop. I found a letter from him in my tent this morning. It came yesterday."

"On his way here, you say?"

"He's going through on the D. & R. M."

"And he won't stop?"

She smiled. "I didn't say that. I said he didn't intend to stop."

"There *is* a distinction," he admitted thoughtfully. "Why doesn't he intend to stop."

"Says he has already spent thirty thousand dollars in surveys to find out that the short cut is not possible. Of course he wraps it up nicely. He'll be pleased to see me in Denver, but he isn't in the least interested in wild cat railroading. I'll show you the letter."

"He'll have to stop and look the line over—even if we have to kidnap him. Winship is absolutely essential to our plans."

"If I could only have a talk with him, but there isn't time for that. He's going through Denver to-morrow."

"On his way east?" Waller asked quickly.

"So I gathered from his letter."

"Does he arrive on the morning or evening limited?"

"I'm not sure, but I think his letter gave the time. Why? Shall we go to Denver with him?"

"If we can't do better. But every hour of travel would be taking him from our work. He's always tremendously busy. Probably he wouldn't take the time to come back and look the situation over. No, that won't do. He's got to get off while he's on the way through."

"We'll have to persuade him."

"Yes, we'll have to persuade him." The grim fighting look was on his face.

"How?"

"That's the question before the house. It's a rather important one, especially since you've put it up to me to return with my shield or on it."

Tessie had been coming toward them from her tent. Now she sang out gaily: "Good morning, you Robinson Crusoes on a mountain island. What's that you said about a shield, Dick?"

"If you young women don't shield yourselves from the sun I won't answer for your complexions," he answered promptly.

She accepted his explanation at face value, rubbing her smooth cheek plaintively. "It's dreadful how the sun tans at this altitude, but that isn't the worst with me. I'm peeling."

She offered as evidence the tip of her nose and Dick agreed that it was a calamity.

Waller caught sight of Dixon and excused himself immediately. The two men went into such earnest consultation that they arrived at breakfast only when the others were half through.

"What's the program for to-day?" Marsh wanted to know.

"I bar mountain climbing," interposed Tessie. "Especially for our chaperone and Dick."

"I have other fish to fry. Business will take me and Mr. Dixon away for about three days. While we're gone you young people have the freedom of the camp. Fish—hunt—ride—do whatever you like. But you, Tessie, are to do what Welly and Miss Lyndon tell you."

Miss Tessie made a moue at her cousin. "Am I? If they want me to go and get stuck like a piece of chewing gum on a rock am I to do it?"

"I say, Waller. Is it your habit to invite guests to your party and then leave them to play by themselves?" Marsh inquired cheerfully.

"This is an exigency, Welly. We're going to bring another guest. At least we hope so."

"Another guest! May a fellow ask who?"

Richard shook his head. "No. It's a surprise."

"For who?" asked Tessie ungrammatically. "For which one of us most?"

Waller exchanged smiles with Nora. "For him principally."

"Doesn't he *know* he's coming?"

"Not yet."

"Is that a riddle?" Tessie demanded.

"Is he young and handsome?" Selma propounded.

"I've never seen him. Miss Lyndon has. Ask her."

"So *she's* in the secret too."

"I shouldn't call him exactly young. As for his appearance, handsome is as handsome does. We'll see how he behaves himself before we decide that," contributed Nora.

"Just one point. Please everybody remember that if he comes this is to be an all-around surprise. He isn't to know that he was expected," cautioned Dick.

Nora had a word with Waller before he and Dixon drove away.

"What is it? What have you decided to do?"

"I can't tell even you that," he explained with a smile that erased his offence of apparent lack of confidence. "It's very much against the law, and I don't want to involve you."

"You're not going to—kidnap Mr. Winship?" she asked with a flash of light.

"Not exactly."

He did not volunteer any further information and she did not ask for any. It was enough for her that he thought it best not to tell the details just now.

Waller and his chief engineer struck across

the hills toward Beaver Dam, the nearest point of contact with the Denver & Rocky Mountain railroad. Into their trap Dixon had slipped several sticks of dynamite, two shovels, a pick, fuses, and other supplies. They traveled all day and well into the night. The moon was out before they drove into the timber above a cut through which ran the track of the D. & R. M.

The point they had chosen for operations was near the top of a long stiff grade on the western side of the divide. Parallel to the track and just above it ran the main canal from Beaver Dam, at present full of water used for irrigating purposes. Throwing off their coats, the two men set to work. For five hours they toiled with pick and shovel preparing for their coup. It was past three o'clock in the morning before they were ready to roll up in their blankets for two hours of sleep.

Soon after daybreak Waller sauntered up to the little Station of Beaver Dam and fell into gossip with the telegraph operator. As a lawyer Richard was famous for his examination of witnesses. Now he drew forth the in-

formation he wanted so casually that the D. & R. M. man did not know he was giving it. No. 7 would be along in less than two hours and would be switched here to let the Denver express pass. These were the only trains due before noon, when the west bound passenger would arrive.

Half an hour later Waller joined Dixon in the timber. From here he slipped out to the canal and set the fuses they had placed in the ditch bank nearest the cut. One after another the charges exploded. Before the two men reached the canal its water was already pouring through the gap and down upon the track.

The stream leaped down the narrow cut in a torrent, devouring the road bed as it went. The sandy dirt ballast was washed away, ties floated down the gulch, and twisted rails were flung into the softened banks.

Enough damage having been done, they drove up to the head gates and notified the man in charge of the dam that there was a break in the canal. He shut off the water at once and went down with them to view the wreckage.

Already the slow labored puffing of a freight which was climbing at a snail's pace up the track notified them of the coming of No. 7. Soon the snorting of the engines ceased. The engineers had discovered that the track in front of them was washed out. Inside of half an hour the express was stopped behind the freight.

Waller did some more casual questioning and showed his surprise at learning the express was carrying a private car of President Winship of the Transcontinental system. He lost no time, however, in introducing himself and Dixon to the great man.

Winship had heard of Waller and said so.

"Aren't you the madman trying to run a line over Ptarmigan Pass down to Denver?" he asked curtly.

"I'm the man, and Mr. Dixon is my chief engineer. But we're not only trying, we're succeeding."

Winship, still at his breakfast, merely grunted scepticism. He was a bigbrained little man

in spectacles with a face in which deep seams were lined. A shrewd judge of men, hard-headed and practical, he yet had a largeness of vision that allowed him to dream dreams. The genius for organization that made the realization of these possible had led him to do wonders in the railroad world during the past decade.

"We take your doubt for granted," Richard went on quietly. "But you're open to proof of course. I'll tell you what we've done and what we expect to do."

"Young man, I know all about your wildcat line. You can't unload it on me," the great financier told him brusquely.

"You don't know the first thing about it," Waller came back with the genial smile that took the sting out of his words. "And as for unloading it on you, before we are through you'll take it at our price and on our own terms."

Winship looked him over more carefully. This young fellow with the thin tanned face and the strong jaw did not look like a braggart.

At the same time there was not a chance that he could deliver the goods.

"You're either deceiving yourself or trying to deceive me. In either case I'm not going to hold the sack for you."

"At least you are willing to hear our case."

"I've already heard it, but go ahead."

The director of the Transcontinental used his finger bowl, put down the crumpled napkin, and pushed back his chair.

"If this short line can be built we can connect with the Transcontinental at Rifle. That will put you into 'Frisco hours ahead of the North Central," Waller began, putting his finger on Winthrop's vital need in two sentences.

The great man glanced sharply at him. Not many provincial lawyers were aware of this fact.

"If—if—if," he growled irritably. "If I could build a line to England I could eliminate seasickness."

"I'm prepared to demonstrate that we can build it."

The railroad Napoleon glared at him over

his spectacles. "Don't believe it. I've investigated this proposition twice—paid good money to do it. There's nothing to it. The cutoff can't be built.'

"I don't ask you to take my word for it—or even Dixon's."

"Whose then? I tell you I've had both Ghent and Bradley go over the ground. They both reported it impossible."

"They were both wrong." The lawyer's cool, even voice contrasted with the annoyed rasp of the financier. "I have in my pocket an opinion written by Redruth. He made surveys for my uncle, Adam Steel. He says it can be done. Dixon and I have been over every inch of the ground. We know it can be done."

"Eh? What's that? Redruth says it can be done?"

"Yes. Your surveyors followed the wrong fork of the Muddy because it seemed to offer the only available working grade. They couldn't get down out of the hills. That's where they made their vital mistake. The

thing is feasible beyond question. Read Redruth's opinion."

Winship plunged into the typewritten statement. If this audacious young man was speaking the truth it meant no less for the Transcontinental than a command of the traffic situation of the West. This sounded too good to be true, but his imagination was already busy with the possibilities.

Twenty minutes later Winship laid the report of the great railroad engineer down on the table in front of him.

"You've got Redruth on your side—if this is a genuine report," he admitted.

"I haven't spent four million dollars of my own and my friends' money on a faked report, Mr. Winship."

The quiet dignity of the words called for an apology and the great man gave it grudgingly.

"I didn't mean that you had, but I'm a business man. I don't take things for granted. Even if Redruth made this survey he may have been wrong."

"We're ready to show you that he wasn't.

Seeing is believing. We've already pierced the Front range at a workable grade. We've done enough to show that Ptarmigan Pass can be crossed. According to the reports of Ghent and Bradley these were the main difficulties. We know they were both wrong, *because our dump is already laid at both points.*"

Winship turned his grizzled brows on this confident young man and tried to frown him down for an impudent impostor. But it would not do. The steady, good-humored eyes held their own.

"What's that? Already laid! How long have you been at this?"

Waller told him, and gave particulars as to the number of men at work and the amount of grade finished. The railroad wizard stared at him in astonishment. If this man was not embellishing the facts he had done wonders. Never in his palmiest days had he pushed work with more vigor.

"That's all very well, Waller. It may be you had a chance to get your road down, but

if you had it's gone now since the government bottled up Trout Lake Cañon."

"Is it? Beg to differ again. We've never intended to run through Trout Lake Cañon, but we had to make Sherwin think so to keep him from corking the gorge we did need."

In a dozen sentences Richard showed the railroader by means of a map the route they were following.

For the first time Winship smiled, and his smile was generous. This boy had drawn the wool over Sherwin's eyes in a masterly fashion. The head of the Transcontinental system had a good many grudges against his great rival and he was mightily pleased at this defeat.

"When can you take me over your line?" he asked abruptly.

Richard knew the battle was won. His blood seemed to sing a pæon of victory, but no emotion reached his controlled face.

"Why not now?" he asked. "You're tied up here for twenty-four hours at least. We'll run you up the line to Black Diamond in a hand-car if we can't do better. From there

we'll drive out to Ptarmigan Pass and look the situation over. I can get you back here by to-morrow night. Next day I'll drive you across to Bear Cañon and prove what I claim about a way out."

"Good enough. I'm in your hands, Mr. Waller. Make good, and you'll find me an easy man to do business with."

The use of a handcar proved unnecessary. Winship's secretary by wiring to Denver secured a helper engine lying in the roundhouse at Beaver Dam. At Black Diamond Waller hired a team and drove his future ally across country to Ptarmigan Pass.

As they bowled over the road Winship asked questions, sharp, incisive and technical. His knowledge of railroading was thorough and before they reached the scene of operations he knew all that was to be known about the short line without having actually inspected it. Once on the grade, he spoke little. In silence he listened to Dixon's explanations, seeing everything and storing impressions away for subsequent reference.

They slept in camp at the Ptarmigan end of the line and in the morning examined the descent from the Pass toward Rifle. By late afternoon they were back at Black Diamond, from which point the helper engine detailed for Winship ran them back to Beaver Dam. The blocked trains had within the past hour or two got under way again, but signs of the washout were still scattered along the track in piles of burning ties and débris.

They dined and slept in Winship's private car, which was lying on the siding at the station. Winship was an early riser, and at daybreak he and Waller were in the trap bound for Bear Creek. They reached the cañon late the same night, but the tireless owner of the transcontinental was out of his tent long before the men were at work. Horses were waiting saddled for him and Waller, and the two men looked over the gorge and the line of approach to it before breakfast.

On their way back to camp Winship approached another phase of the matter.

"Well, what do you want for your railroad

if my engineers are satisfied it is a physical possibility?" he asked abruptly.

"Nothing that isn't fair. I projected this line for one purpose, to supply the Consolidated with a means of getting out its fuel and ore. Any sale on our part must be subject to an ironclad agreement that will safeguard our traffic absolutely for years."

Winship nodded. "Of course. You're entitled to that. And since I'll want the line to do all the business it can we'll have no difficulty there."

"I pledged the people of this state my word that the road would succeed. They ran a big risk when they put their money into the proposition and they are entitled to a fair and reasonable profit. Except for that you'll get the road at absolute cost. There are no promoter's profits to be taken out. None of us are going to divide a melon. There is not a dollar's worth of water in the whole stock issue. Each of us paid for what he got."

"Sounds reasonable," commented Winship dryly. Privately he was wondering why this

very able young man—certainly the most competent to get things done he had met in a long time—did not hold him up for a stiff profit. Was it possible after all that he did not realize how absolutely he held the key to the mastery of the railroad West? The Transcontinental man knew that rather than not get control of the short line he would pay almost any figure demanded. It was just as well Waller was not aware of this.

While he was congratulating himself on this the Denver man answered his thoughts.

"Of course we know what this is worth to you. We can sell out to Sherwin for three times the figure we're asking you. But we can't afford to let him have the line. My chief purpose is to protect the C. F. & S. That was our sole purpose in building. We couldn't do this if Sherwin got control. That's why we're offering you the bargain of your life."

"It's not because you're so fond of me then," laughed Winship.

"Your interests run parallel with ours. To

serve yourself you have to be our friend. We lay no claim to philanthropy."

"I'm glad you don't, because I wouldn't believe you. I think we understand each other. I need your road. You want to shift the expense of finishing it upon somebody you can depend on. You need me just as much as I do the short cut. Isn't that the fact?"

"You've hit the nail on the head."

"If I'm going to handle this thing I'll want a controlling interest in the cutoff. I'm more than willing to take it off your hands and push it through with Dixon's help as fast as I can. But it must be as a part of the Transcontinental system."

"I think I can guarantee to get you the control."

A young woman was coming down the bank of the creek toward them. She was still too far away to make out her face, but Dick was a lover and he knew of only one person under Heaven who walked like that. She carried herself with elastic tread, head well up, and

gave a billowy effect of swimming through waves of soft drapery.

Winship shook hands with her, but was hardly persuaded that his eyes were not playing him tricks.

"Is this really you, Miss Lyndon? Whatever in the world are you doing here?"

"Helping to build a railroad. Didn't I write you about it?" her eyes danced. "I'm a suspicious person. I came to see whether I am getting my money's worth."

"And are you?"

"I think so. What do you think?"

"I'll not tell you that for fear of boosting the price. I'm thinking of buying you out."

"Now you have told me," she triumphed. "If you didn't believe in our line you wouldn't buy it."

He laughed. "Wouldn't I? Young woman, I might have known you would be altogether too clever for me. I'm too old to cope with a composite of Rosalind and Beatrice and Portia. Attack somebody of your size. Try Waller here. He's clever too."

"Am I? That's rank flattery after I've just missed holding you up for that couple of millions extra I might have squeezed out of you," Waller differed.

Winship was in high good humor. "You've done better than hold me up. You've put me where I've got to back the Consolidated against the steel trust. And that's what you were after."

"You're clever too, or you would never have guessed that," Nora flung at him.

"I'm not a fool. That's as far as you can get me to praise myself."

He swung from the saddle stiffly and turned toward his tent, but a word from Richard stopped him.

"One thing more, Mr. Winship. There'll be a little bill to pay for washing out the D. & R. M. tracks at Beaver Dam. Since you're to blame for the ditch running wild I think you ought to write a check for the amount."

The old railroad builder stared at him in astonishment. "Me to blame. How do you make that out, young man?"

"Your obstinacy." Waller's eyes were twinkling.

"Hm! I like your cheek. But what has my—hm!—determination got to do with the accident. I don't own the ditch."

"No, but the accident"—Dick emphasized ever so slightly the word—"wouldn't have happened if you had listened to reason."

"You're talking Greek to me."

Nora projected herself into the conversation with a command. Her eyes were bright with eagerness. "First tell me what the accident was."

Winship outlined in two sentences the facts as he knew them.

The young woman clapped her hands in delight. "Don't you see? He did it."

"Did what?"

"Brought about the accident somehow. I don't know how. You wouldn't stop to look at our railroad. So he stopped you anyhow."

"Do you mean to tell me that he deliberately took the chance of wrecking two trains to force me to stop?"

Miss Lyndon shook her golden head vigorously. "No. You don't know Mr. Waller yet. He eliminated any chance of a real accident, but just the same he did it."

"How?"

"I don't know. Ask him."

"I haven't said I did anything," protested Waller coolly. "But if someone did blow out the side of the ditch at that point in broad daylight the freight train wasn't in danger. It was crawling up a four per cent. grade and the engineer had plenty of time to see there was a washout."

"Quite so." The keen eyes of Winthrop could not conceal their admiration. "You're a cool hand, young man—just about the coolest I've ever known. But if you say I'm to blame we'll let it go at that. Send me the bill."

"The D. & R. M. will bring suit against the irrigation company for damages caused by its weak canal. The case will be compromised out of court. I'll notify you for what amount."

"How do you know all that will happen?"

"I happen to be the attorney for the ditch company."

"I see. Well, I'll settle the bill, but keep my name out of it."

"Of course. The president of the company will be so pleased to have the claim paid by an outsider that he will ask no questions. I'll make that a condition precedent."

"All right. Now if you'll excuse me I'll go wash for breakfast."

As soon as Winship had left them Nora turned to Richard.

"It's all right, is it? He'll finish the road for us, will he?"

"Yes, it's all right at last. The Lyndon cut-off is going through."

"I'm so glad . . . *so* glad. You've fought so well—and now you've won. Nobody else could have done it."

"Can't be sure of that. Nobody else happened to have it put up to him. But I do know this, that I couldn't have done it without you."

"I wish I could believe that. Anyhow, you've done it. That's the main thing."

"Not to me. The main thing is that *we've* done it—you and I together. Dear, I want to talk with you. I've got lots to tell you. Will you ride with me this morning? Say at ten."

"If my lord pleases," she murmured with the twisted little smile he loved.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

IT was a day of sunshine, tender and warm, filled with such air and light as one finds only in the Rockies. Still in the glow of their reunion, words were superfluous to their happiness. The meeting of eyes, the turn of a head, the sound of laughter shaken into the air lightly as the song of a thrush, made for them love's incoherent rapture.

Not until they had reached a little park in the mountains and had dismounted to gather wild flowers was any verbal reference made to the subject that filled every crevice of both their thoughts.

"Was ever such a perfect day?" she cried exultantly.

He knew it was not the day alone, but the music and the rhythm of love leaping in her veins that translated the scene to fairyland.

"Never . . . never."

She walked beside him, grave and gracious, lightfooted and glad.

"Is it because we are together?" Happy laughter rippled over her face as she answered herself. "What a question! It's because we're here . . . together . . . in this best of worlds . . . to live and to love."

"Together again—now that I've brought my shield back safely."

"Yes . . . with the golden road all clear before us." She spoke softly. There was a flush in the cheeks just beneath the eyes that met his bravely. "We've won our joy. We're free to take it now."

To hear her say it was sweet beyond words.

"You care, too? You want to . . . go love's way?" he asked in a low voice.

Drawn by the magnet of their feelings, she was already in his arms whispering her confession to him.

"Dear, I want to be very close to you. I want to take my heart and give it into your brown fists to hold tight." Then, in a murmur

he could just hear: "Ought I to lie to myself —and to you? Ought I to be ashamed of . . . love? I'm not. I glory in it. Clean passion is a part of me. It's not bad . . . or wrong, is it?"

"Wrong! I thank God that my sweetheart is a free woman and brave enough to tell the truth. Passion is always noble when true love is back of it."

"Yes. You've said it, dear. Love ennobles everything. It is the Midas touch that turns all within reach to gold." Her soft, supple body clung to his. The smile on the uplifted face was radiant. "It's going to be that way with our marriage, little delights for us in all the common things of life. I know it must be so. A true marriage brings vital joy into the world, just as one without love withers all beauty and joy."

"You're sure, at last, then, about us?" he asked.

"I'm sure as sure."

"Then there's nothing for us to do but to get married and live happily ever after."

"That's all." She freed herself gently from his embrace. "I'm so happy that I want to be selfish about it. I'd like to just go and be married in the old way."

"You'll find me ready," he promised lightly.

"Yes, dear, but—one ought to have the courage of her convictions. If one is a free woman one ought to set the right example. You'll let me be married to you in my own way, won't you, Richard? It isn't that I don't trust you. I'm sure that I love you for always. I come to you without reservations. Every fiber of me goes out to you. I give my life into your keeping. But we owe a duty to all lovers. For their sake we'll live the truth. I shall be a free woman and you will be a free man."

"You mean . . . that we are to be lovers without a legal marriage?"

"I'll be your wife and you'll be my husband, and, yes! we'll always be lovers."

"But without the sanction of the law?"

"Love and not legality is the test of marriage. I'll stand up with you before witnesses and promise to be your wife as long as love

lasts, and you'll promise as much for me. We shall be far more truly married than if we merely had a legal certificate to tell us we belonged to each other. Isn't it all a question of the heart, dear? The mumbling of a priest can't keep a marriage without love from being a violation of all the deepest things in life."

"You know what this means, dear," he said gravely. "You realize what society will do to you?"

"Oh, society!" she laughed the wisdom of the world to scorn and tossed it from her with a superb gesture. "It cares only about the letter of the law, its inevitable conventions. What does it know of intrinsic morality?"

"Women not good enough to black your boots will point you out and scorn you as a bad woman."

"Let them. Most women's heads are full of second-hand stuff. They have never stood on their feet intellectually. They must be wakened. Some day this haphazard world of ours will take on coherence. Society will reconstruct itself along better lines. Then life

will be a brave, clean thing, altogether beyond the world's present concept of it. But some men and women must blaze the way to freedom."

"Must you be one of the women?"

"If I know the truth shall I not live it?" she asked gently.

The difficulties of the course she proposed thronged before his mind. Legal complications, the censure of society, the possibility of children: all of these rose as barriers.

"The world is cruel. It never forgives."

Her smile was like that of a Madonna in its warmth and courage. "My dear, the world can only punish those who accept its punishment. It can't reach those who live above the fear of it."

He looked away to the sharp clear-cut mountain outlines, silhouetted brilliant as sapphires in an atmosphere crystal hard. It was amazing that so much of their calm strength was in this glowing young divinity who had come like a gift from God into his life. In spite of the softly molded form, of the sweet curve

of the red lips that came to meet his with such frank surrender, she was as inflexible as a Spartan mother where duty was involved. If any among the women he had met were strong enough to prove the caution of the world cowardice, it was this sweetheart of his with the bewitching eyes and the beguiling smile.

"Do you quite know what subtle cruelties you would have to meet?"

"I think I quite know. It won't be as bad as you think. There are a lot of free people in the world—the artists of all kinds, the writers and the poets, those who live above formalism. All who seek for truth would welcome us even if they didn't see it just as we do."

"You have thought of . . . our children?"

She gave him her hand with a smile that irradiated her face. Thought of them? Dear, I've *dreamed* of them . . . and longed for them. Last night a baby's fingers—your baby, Richard, and mine—groped over my face and patted my cheek till I awoke. Dear, I lay there in the darkness and cried for joy because

. . . it will be that way with us some day. Our babies are already reaching out their plump little dimpled hands to us."

The desire of her and of life beside her took him with a catch of the breath. What right had he to try to dwarf this mother of unborn heroes to the conventions that violated her convictions?

He knew perfectly well that the State, representing Society, has always treated the problems of sex—which are the most complex and yet the most vital to the welfare of the race—with an hypocrisy and a bourgeois timidity that evaded the real issues. It has attempted to dispose of the evils resulting from unfortunate marriage and other sex relationships by ignoring them and penalizing some of the offenders while permitting others to go free. Superficial ideas of duty have warped all right thinking along such lines.

"My dear . . . my dear, I love you. I don't want you to suffer," he protested.

"Why shouldn't I suffer if it comes in the way of duty?" she asked him.

"Can I forgive myself if I bring it on you?"

"You're giving me a chance to find fuller life. That means both joy and sorrow. And you're going to share the sorrow, too."

"Yes," he admitted dubiously.

"It's like this with girls," she went on quickly. "They are hothouse grown, sheltered from all the waves of life—and then flung into the pool to sink or swim, just as it happens." She laughed at her illustration. "I'm mixing my figures, but that doesn't matter. Sometimes the poor thing swims. More often she sinks. She marries a man who is a stranger to her. Of course, they may have known each other on the surface for years, but that doesn't count. These strangers go into a house, and lock the door, and throw the key out of the window, declaring they're going to be perfectly happy for ever and ever in their prison. That is marriage, as we have it now. Don't you think it would be better to keep the key for escape in case either has made a mistake?"

He smiled. "If you're trying to make a con-

vert of me, it can't be done. I'm already on your side. The present marriage laws and customs are indefensible."

"Of course they are. No matter how brave and true and strong a woman may be, she is held immoral if she becomes a mother without the formal permit of society. She may be married in the sight of God and loyal to the core. That doesn't matter in the least. She may be the best of mothers and of wives. None the less, she is a bad woman. The thing is absurd and yet it is tragic."

"Yes, it is tragic." He took her in his arms and looked almost sadly down into her eyes. "It will have to be with us as you say, dear. I know that. You are a free woman, but . . . how can I let you go straight to what may be a tragedy for you?"

"I'll have to pay the price of freedom, but I'll be glad to pay it. We'll be misunderstood. That can't be helped. Our friends will know that we are not advocates of free love, but of love's freedom. And you and I will know that we are knit together in the truest of marriages.

It will be no tragedy for us, because we can choose our own environment."

"You mean that we can travel—live abroad——"

"No. I mean that we'll make our own spiritual atmosphere. Slander and gossip can't hurt us if we don't let ourselves know they exist." Her smile broke through the gravity of her face soft and brilliant as a rainbow on an August day. "My dear, we can't be unhappy so long as we have each other . . . and love."

Her high courage shamed him, though it was not for himself he was pleading. There were moments when she seemed to him the song of a bird translated into flesh, so lightly and buoyantly did the perfect poise of her sweet, young body express the spirit within. But now, with the light of conviction glowing steadily in her eyes, he felt in her that quality of greatness which can suffer without bitterness and sacrifice without resentment.

They walked hand in hand through a field sown sparsely with Indian Paint Brushes.

For the most part she talked and he listened, for she was eager to convince him beyond question that the essence of love lies in its freedom and that marriage is a spiritual rite.

"I am thinking of three women I know," she presently told him. "One is married and has a child. She eats breakfast in bed, gets up late, and spends her time at bridge afternoons and society functions. Day in, day out, that love-hungry kid does not see his mother. A nurse brings him up. I know another married woman who has no children and takes care that she shall have none. Her husband makes money in order that she may scatter it frivolously. Neither of these women pay the debt they owe society. They are parasites. In very truth they are kept women. In return for a certain number of motor cars, a certain amount of luxury, they give to their husbands the least the law requires. Is that marriage?"

"Let's hear about the third woman."

"She has children—four of them. Her life is spent for them and for their father. The blue-bird of happiness dwells in that home.

'Muzzer,' as they call her, is a comrade to all of them. She works most of the day, for they are not rich. But she sings as she works—little songs that bubble up from the heart. Through that union vital joy has been born into the world. But it's all very shocking and deplorable." She regarded him with a smile gently ironic. "She can't show any marriage lines. You see, he was married before—to a woman, hard, narrow, unforgiving, unloving. His first wife never cared for him after the first few months—if she ever did—but she cherishes resentment against him for loving another. So she won't ask for her divorce. It's part of her *goodness* that she won't go into court and let these lovers regularize their marriage. She never wanted children herself, but she can't help hating the woman who did."

"Yes; justice is blind. Our court rules are rigid. We make man fit himself to the law, instead of adjusting law to individual needs."

"Those three *good* women think this happy little mother a moral leper. If she came their way they would draw their skirts closer and

thank God they're not as she is. Which of the four is a true wife, Richard?"

He swept her into his arms and surrendered unconditionally, as he had known from the first that he must.

"You shall do as you think right, Nora. Only . . . I want to spare you unhappiness."

Her lips trembled the least in the world. She nodded briskly but choked a little over her words. "I know . . . I know, dear. It's your instinct to protect me from criticism and harshness. You'd far rather marry me in the orthodox way because an abstract principle is less important to you than my peace of mind and good name. You think I'll have to pay and so you *hate* to let me do an irregular thing." Her tilted smile flashed up at him. "But you'll have to pay, too. You'll never be president now, since you have dared to think for yourself. Your friends will think you a little—queer. They'll even distrust your business judgment until you've proved yourself again. And you'll lose most of the tremendous

popularity you've earned and are about to enjoy for putting through the short line. Oh, you'll find you've got to pay, too."

A squadron of billowy clouds had chased each other across the blue above. From the last and largest of these pencil slants of rain came down in a swift patter.

Waller glanced up. "Can't last more than a minute or two." But he untied the waterproof from his saddle and held it while she protestingly slipped her arms into the sleeves.

His prediction was verified. The sun flashed out and flung a rainbow across the upper vault. The shower passed as suddenly as it had begun. But the rain had magically softened the atmosphere. Through the breaks in the foliage on the edge of the park came flashes of iridescent light. At the heart of every flower, at the base of every grass blade nestled a shining pearl dropped from heaven.

The sheer beauty of it filled her with incommunicable joy. Her filmy eyes turned to

his. Ever so slightly he nodded his appreciation of her feeling. It was not necessary to tell him what a lovely setting this wonderful world was for their idyll.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THRO' ALL THE WORLD SHE FOLLOWED HIM"

RICHARD and Nora were married at sunrise in the hotel of the little town of Red Rock, a station on the Denver & Rocky Mountain line. A grizzled justice of the peace in miners' boots—after a formal public protest that he questioned the validity of the marriage—read the service that had been drawn up jointly by the lovers. The only witnesses present were Harshaw and Mrs. Hiller.

It was all as simple as possible. The two joined hands and looked into each other's eyes as they took their vows. Each promised to be true and loyal in thought and deed so long as love endured, and, in case this failed, to part by common consent.

Afterward the four had breakfast in a private room at the hotel. Then Waller inspected the two riding horses waiting in front of the

porch, while Nora changed her simple wedding gown for the new corduroy riding suit she had ordered for the occasion. Their honeymoon was to be far away in the primeval hills both of them loved so much, where the clatter of tongues and the prying eyes that desecrate the first days of marriage would not reach them.

They rode out of Red Rock into the great hills that surrounded the mining camp, following a road that zigzagged up the side of one and slid down over its shoulder into the valley beyond. Where they were going she knew not. The place had been chosen and prepared by him. But as the hours of travel slipped past, as the road became a trail and even the trail spun itself out, the peace in her heart overflowed and submerged the shy apprehension of the captured girl whose lover is still a mystery.

She had always felt that she could not come into the full fruition of her possibilities except through love. All her life she had known a passionate yearning for it. Fragmentary pictures of her past stood out before her, and

now it seemed that all of them had been a preparation for this day. She could see herself a lonely little tot at school without parents or near kin. Always she had made friends, but through the time of her artistic struggles and her successes had run the note of incompleteness. Then love had come to her and wounded her cruelly and died to gray ashes. While she still shrank with the pain of it the passion and the desire of men had driven her into the arms of Adam Steel.

At last love had found her again. It was taking her into the untrod wilderness beside this man who was from henceforth to play so great a part in her life. She looked at him, with a fascinated curiosity extraordinarily stimulated by her fondness for him. The joy of the bridegroom shone in his bronzed face without detracting from its strength. Wherever she had seen him tested—whether facing a great audience and molding its many-minded will to his, or pushing indomitably his railroad dump through the rockribbed mountains, or through a long bitter night pouring the vital-

ity from his own body into her blue bloodless flesh to save her from the effects of exposure —he had always proved sure, strong, dominant, a master of men and untoward fate. He was dependable as steel. No matter what misfortunes befell him his life would not be rudderless. Knowing him both generous and loyal, her trust in him was fixed.

But, after all, they were still strangers. They had progressed such a little way in knowledge of each other. This was as it should be. She wanted always to be making new discoveries about him, to be finding new points of contact. From what she knew she could deduce enough of the uncharted geography of his mind to make her feel reasonably safe in her explorations. This was the joy marriage brought to those who were happily mated, that the charm of one for the other was never exhausted because deep, unsolved secrets of being still enticed.

Nora asked no questions about their destination. Before they had traveled an hour she was completely lost and content that it should

be so. About noon they stopped for luncheon by a brawling little stream. Rainbow trout could be seen flashing to and fro in the clear water, but neither of them even wished to disturb the unbroken peace.

Almost within the hour they were in the saddle again. Nora judged from the certainty of her lover's movements that he knew exactly where they were, but she could distinguish no familiar landmarks. Since their nooning they had been climbing steadily.

"Tired?" he asked her once.

She scoffed at his question, and, indeed, the poise of her body, still elastic as a rapier, was sufficient answer.

"I could go on forever, 'beyond their utmost purple rim,'" she cried with a wave of her quirt at the mountains. "Lead on, my Lord. I'll ride at your heels.

> 'And deep into the dying day
> The happy princess follow'd him,'"

she quoted.

He smiled gravely, watching the capricious play of sunlight as it touched to living gold the curve of her throat and the strong oval of her chin.

"It's not far now. We'll reach camp before sunset," he promised.

"What if we get lost?" she demanded.

"I hope we are . . . to the world. That's why we've been traveling all day."

She looked at him quickly and looked away. Beneath her eyes the cheeks glowed with excitement. She wondered if he, too, was being drawn to an emotional climax by that setting sun.

Their temperaments found different expression. Whereas she gained relief in a forced sprightliness tinged with sweet derision, his passion held too keen an edge to dissipate itself in laughter.

When at last he brought her to the spot of his choosing the loveliness of it drew from her a breath of deep delight. They were looking down into a little valley bathed in the shimmering light of late afternoon. Here, surely,

they were at the end of the world, on the edge of an Eden freed of material grossness. Some magic wand had touched the sharp outlines to a golden sparkling haze. The changing foliage of the open grove had gathered the gold of the sun in great masses. Over the park played an iridescent glow that would have satisfied the dream of a poet.

She could find no words in which to voice her deep feeling. He knew that tears were close to the soft eyes that looked gratefully into his.

He pointed silently to the white gleam of a tent in the russet grove.

A discovery surprised a question from her.

"It's our own park, isn't it?"

"The one where we were caught in the shower. I made up my mind then it would be here."

"Oh, Dick!"

"I rode out here with a pack horse on Monday and put up the tent."

"All by yourself?'

"Do you think I would let anyone else share the preparations with me?" he asked gently.

Their eyes met and fastened. He took her in his arms. Inevitably their lips came together.

> "I'd sleep another hundred years,
> O love, for such another kiss,"

she quoted, with the murmur of fond raillery by means of which she was wont to defend her emotion from him.

With a little laugh of shy embarrassment she disengaged herself.

"We must get to camp, my lord."

He could not keep his gaze from her. "We have a million years before us."

"The shadows are creeping up the hillside. See. They are stretching to the grove. Soon it will be night."

"Yes. Soon now."

He had said it almost in a whisper. Though she did not look at him, she knew his face was turned to the hills. Why must the pulse in

her throat start beating at his words? Why did her blood begin to race as at an electric shock?

They rode down into the enchanted valley. Already the mountains had lost their edge and were melting into the sea of deep purple that floods them after sunset.

She found the tent all ready for use, even to a carpet of Navajo blankets. Her first thought was to rid herself of the dust of travel. After she had washed and pinned back in their place some flying tendrils of hair she issued from the tent to help make supper. Already Dick had unsaddled and freed their ponies to join the pack horse they found grazing at a little distance. His camp fire was blazing and he was busying himself among frying pans and baking dishes. He had flung off his coat and the strong muscles of his neck sloped beautifully to the powerful shoulders. Her dramatic sense found a keen pleasure in the competency of this man to meet all situations that arose.

She trod lightly across the grass to him.

"My sixty-horse-power husband, haven't you left anything for me to do?"

"I'm cook to-night. You may set the table if you like."

The sunshine had long since disappeared from even the rim of the hill. While they ate the purple hue faded from the mountains to a soft violet, so that, as the darkness fell, the hills became only a darker silhouette against the skyline. All day they had been alone in a world of crystal light and magnificent distances, but now night was pressing upon them closely, so that among these shadowy peaks and the mournful pines they were driven together for companionship.

He came and lay beside her with his head in her lap. They kept their watch in a silence more full than words. A star came out just above the crotch of the hill they had descended. Presently another twinkled—and another—till the heavens began to fill with them.

One question only he asked her.

"You're not . . . sorry?"

She looked tremulously down into his grave

eyes, but behind her emotion was the tender smile he loved. "Do I look . . . sorry?"

"You wouldn't change anything? Your heart doesn't fail? There is still time to . . . conform to the world's way . . . if you wish it."

"No. I would change nothing." Presently she went on, with that lifted look he knew so well: "Less to-night than ever before. Out here—in the open hills—with God's freedom all about us—more than ever I want to do right."

"I asked because——"

She took up his unfinished sentence. "I know, dear. But I am doing what I think is best. Even in our marriage I want to be a free woman and you to be a free man. No; I have no regrets."

Again the silence of the night lapped about them, unbroken save for the murmur of the wind in the leaves.

He felt a little shiver run through her.

"Are you cold?" he cried.

"No . . . no," she protested.

How could she tell him that her soul quiv-

ered and palpitated in the slender body! How could she put into words the inarticulate emotion that played upon her as if she were an instrument!

He ran to the tent and brought her a cloak, then renewed the fire with the dead pine limbs he had cut a few days before.

Sitting a little apart from her, he watched the face he loved as it was flung into the light now and again by the shooting flames. He wondered what she was thinking of as she sat there so still and looked into the fire. Was it possible that she could ever grow more dear to him, this golden sweetheart of his with the face of a maid and the courage of a martyr? Her every motion called to him, her every glance drummed on his heart. The perfect poise of her sweet young head was a thing of music to him.

Presently the long lashes of her eyes fell to the soft, hot cheeks.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I forgot I was staring at you."

"You weren't staring," she corrected.

"Your eyes were telling me . . . good news."

"Not news—surely not news."

"No—not news," she admitted. "But I want them to tell it sometimes, just as if it were news," she added softly.

"As long as I live they'll tell it."

Her feet were crossed and drawn up beneath the short skirt so that laced fingers held together the arms supporting her knees.

"Then they'll always be messengers of joy to me," he just made out.

After a long silence he spoke again. "I suppose I ought to look after the horses."

She did not answer, nor did her gaze leave the glow of the fire. She knew that when he left it would be a signal that the day was done.

Dick found himself unaccountably reluctant to leave. For the moment his passion was a spent wave receding from the shore. In this scene set to lower lights the spiritual note of her loveliness was dominant. He loved the soul of her—the brave, sweet soul, which found expression in that soft, young body, so delicate and yet so strong. Their betrothal had been

the happiest time of his life. She had been to him always both an inspiration and a delight. The hours were carrying them to a changed relation. Life could never be just the same for either of them again. Whatever happiness it might bring, there would be at least some loss.

The minutes slipped away.

"I wish I could tell you . . . I wish I could tell you," he said at last in a low, uneven voice.

"I know. I know, dear. It's that way with me, too. I'm just . . . happy. You can't know how I've been . . . flooded with joy since we came together."

"In all my work—whatever I have done—you've run through it as the motive power. I've never been so strong, so able to do things."

She lifted the hand that had found hers and held it against her soft cheek, moving her head up and down slowly so as to make of the gesture a caress.

"This is what all my life was meant for," he broke out. "Ever since I was a boy I've been moving toward it . . . and I didn't know.

I wonder if there has been in all the million lovers of the ages so happy a man."

"Anyhow, there's one woman just as happy."

For long they sat without words and without movement. The fire fell together in collapse. A long sigh escaped him.

"I must go to the horses."

"Yes," she agreed, and released his hand.

He stooped toward her. For a moment they clung to each other, yearning with inarticulate desire for the dear days that, after this hour, would be only memories.

With just a touch of sadness he quoted from the poem of Tennyson that had earlier been in her mind, too.

> "And o'er the hills, and far away
> Beyond their utmost purple rim,
> Beyond the night, across the day,
> Thro' all the world she follow'd him."

Softly she echoed the last verse. "Thro' all the world she follow'd him."

It came to him that he had never before faced so great a responsibility. Her life had

been given into his keeping. He held her heart in the hollow of his hand. If he failed of his trust—even though the failure might be involuntary and necessary—she would creep back to the world a wounded thing, instead of the joyous, high-hearted creature that now she was. They had joined forces to seek together enhanced happiness and power, but the adventure carried with it a risk of tremendous loss.

She guessed something of what he was thinking and the smile on her fine, spirited face reproached him.

"Dear, we can choose no great gain without some chance of loss. I came to you because I love you . . . with all my heart. Let us be glad and not fear. It has come to us, this great thing, to bless us and those about us. I know . . . something deep down in me keeps whispering it . . . that we shall love with all our souls too . . . forever and ever."

"Amen to that," he whispered softly. "I believe it too."

Then, quite suddenly, she released him. "Go . . . dear."

He walked away. At the edge of the grove he turned. She was looking steadily into the fire, her arms locked about her knees.

More than once as he looked after the horses Waller saw through the open grove a light in the tent and a shadow against the white canvas. His bride was making preparations for the final surrender that is the seal of woman's love.

His wedding night! As he looked at the great shadowy peaks and the starry heavens above, he was flooded with a sense of his unworthiness. He had come to marriage with a record better than most men bring. Essentially he was clean-minded. His occasional lapses from celibacy he had trampled under foot and forgotten. But, because of her within the tent there, whose heart he knew was fluttering like a frightened caged bird, he wanted to be clean as the great outdoors of the wind-swept Rockies. He would have liked to blot out the ugly pages of the past and to begin again. The humility that comes to all decent men at such an hour had its way with him.

Before he returned to the grove the light had gone out in the tent. He covered the coals of the camp-fire with ashes and dirt as a protection against a possible rise of the wind and made sure that their supplies were out of reach of any night prowler of the forest world.

Outside the tent he stood for a moment and drew in the sweet breath of the pines. He could have cried with Browning: "How good is man's life, the mere living!"

Reverently he lifted the tent-flap and stepped within.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE LONGING THAT MAKES THEM ONE"

SLEEP still clinging to her eyes and flushed cheeks, Nora came out of the tent and watched the young sun pour a lake of warm light into the valley.

Dick's voice came cheerily to her. "Last call for breakfast in the dining-car."

In spite of herself she sighed. This was the last day of their two weeks' honeymoon. To-morrow they must pack up and go back to the cares and the duties of life. They had been buoyantly happy together. She grudged him to the world whose claims would very largely take him from her. Now she was all in all to him. He had no thoughts or activities that did not include her. Once back in the world, she knew this could not be so.

As her elastic tread carried the young wife across the turf to him she smiled at her parsi-

mony. Was it for this she had joined hands with him—to absorb him wholly, so that he would have neither time nor energy to give to those causes which needed him? She must be a help to him, an inspiration to service. Above all, she must never stand between him and the freedom of life.

They talked of their plans for the day. Sometimes they had fished together, carrying their luncheon with them to eat on some sunny spot beside the bank of the little river. Again they had taken long tramps, resting for hours at a time whenever the fancy took them, to come back to camp at night happy and hungry and tired with the physical fatigue which makes sleep a luxury. But to-day they agreed to stay in camp and do nothing but enjoy the pleasure of idleness.

They lingered over breakfast and afterward over washing the dishes. Later they sat down together on the hillside. Womanlike, Nora made a pretence of industry. She had with her one of Dick's flannel shirts, the shoulder of which had been torn by a thorn.

But in that drowsy sunbeat time slept. The primeval world about them lay lapped in indolence. Here emotions dominated thoughts and actions. Laggard pulses beat lazily. Surely, joy and youth and love made up the sum of life. To this Eden the toils and wrongs and struggles of the world did not penetrate. Nora had no worries, just now no ambitions. If only life could flow on unchanged!

It was not that she had any fear of the future. For her all chance of doubt was finally laid to rest. He was, in very truth, her mate. They fitted each other. Not only did they think alike about essentials, but in the little things they were in perfect harmony. Nothing that he did or said grated on her. Lovers they were and always would be. She wanted children—many of them—to wash and nurse and love with little kisses and tuck away at night with lullabys, but she was resolved that even their children should not come between her and Richard. As for her career, she had sacrificed it to love. She would never hear again the wave of approval beat across the footlights

to her from the public that had always been so generous of its affection. For Love had found her and stolen ambition, or rather changed its vent. Now she wanted to live for her husband and for the little ones God would give them.

"Are you ready to go back?" he asked, lying full length on the warm ground, with his eyes on the drifting mackerel clouds.

"Are you?" she countered, with her little enigmatic smile.

Without hesitation his answer came. "No. I want to stay here. I never wanted anything more."

"Must you go?"

He spoke after a minute's pause. "I suppose I ought to go. Winship wants to see me —and Drake. There are a lot of loose ends to be picked up."

"Oh, if it's only loose ends!"

"Unfortunately, it isn't. The whole matter of the transfer of the short line has to be arranged. Perhaps I could write about it. . . . But I ought to be there in person."

She saw a troubled little frown between his eyes. Duty pulled him one way, love another. After all, why shouldn't he take another week? Surely business could wait on their happiness for seven days. And Nora did so long for just a few days more with him alone. All she had to do was to ask it and he would stay.

But he had promised to meet Winship and arrange things with him. He had still to finish the good fight he had fought so well. She had no right to put her personal feeling before the public good.

"I'd love to stay," she sighed.

"That settles it. We'll stay. I'll ride down to Foster's ranch and have a wire sent to Winship that I'll not reach New York until a week after the time set."

"No . . . no! You'll keep the appointment." The wings of her faith began to beat strongly again. "I didn't marry you to come between you and your work, but to help you. We'll finish our honeymoon some other time, but now we'll go back to the world that calls

you. There is work to be done and we must do it."

He turned upon her eyes that shone with pride and love. "My sweetheart, I'm the richest man under heaven."

Happiness flushed faintly into her face at his praise.

"It's just selfishness in me," she laughed. "We couldn't really enjoy ourselves if we knew we were stealing our good times. So it's back to the world for us."

"We'll be just as happy there," he prophesied.

She nodded her head eagerly half a dozen times. "Yes . . . yes."

Her husband came across and kissed her. "There isn't any time or space in love. It fills the universe."

The supple body clung to him, her cheek against his.

"Do folks ever die of too much joy, Dick?" she asked with the whimsical note in her voice.

He answered with a stanza from Henley.

"Oh, it's die we must, but it's live we can,
And the marvel of earth and sun
Is all for the joy of woman and man,
And the longing that makes them one."

Her warm arms crept round his neck. She sighed contentedly.

" 'The longing that makes them one.' Isn't it good, Dick?"

THE END

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